

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER, 1928

Vol. LXXIX

NUMBER 4

It Came Out of Egypt

A SERIES OF SIX MYSTERIES FROM THE LAND OF THE NILE

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FIRST MYSTERY—THE MASK OF SET

THE exact manner in which mental stress will affect a man's physical health is often difficult to predict. Robert Cairn was in the pink of condition when he left Oxford to take up his London journalistic appointment; but the tremendous nervous strain wrought upon him by a series of events wholly outside the radius of normal things had broken him physically, where it might have left unscathed a more highly strung, though less bodily vigorous man.

Those who have passed through such a nerve storm as had laid Cairn low will know that convalescence seems like a welcome awakening from a dreadful dream. It was indeed in a state between awaking and dreaming that the young man took counsel with his father—the latter more

pale than was his wont, and somewhat anxious-eyed—and determined upon a rest cure in Egypt.

"I have made it all right at the office, Rob," said Dr. Cairn. "In three weeks or so, at Cairo, you will receive instructions to write up a series of local articles. Until then, my boy, take a complete rest and don't worry—above all, don't worry. You and I have passed through a saturnalia of horror, and you, less inured to horrors than I, have gone down. I don't wonder."

"Where is Antony Ferrara?" Robert asked his father.

Dr. Cairn shook his head, and his eyes gleamed with a sudden anger.

"For God's sake, my son, don't mention his name!" he said. "That topic is taboo,

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Rob. I may tell you, however, that he has left England."

In this unreal frame of mind, then, and as one but partly belonging to the world of things actual, Cairn found himself an invalid, who but yesterday had been a hale man; found himself shipped for Port Said; found himself entrained for Cairo; and, with an awakening to the realities of life, an emerging from an evil dream to lively interest in the novelties of Egypt, found himself following the red-jerseyed Shepherd's porter along the corridor of the train and out upon the platform.

A short drive through those singular streets where East meets West, in the sudden, violet dusk of Lower Egypt, and he was amid the bustle of the popular hotel.

Sime was there, whom he had last seen at Oxford—Sime the phlegmatic. He apologized for not meeting the train, but explained that his duties had rendered it impossible. Sime was attached temporarily to an archaeological expedition as medical man, and his athletic and somewhat bovine appearance contrasted oddly with Cairn's unhealthy gauntness.

"I only got in from Wasta ten minutes ago, Cairn. You must come out to the camp when I go back there. The desert air will put you on your feet again in no time."

Cairn shook his head. His expression was enigmatical.

"Sime," he said, glancing nervously around him, "I owe my present condition to Antony Ferrara."

"Eh?" grunted Sime, staring curiously. "He was a bugbear of yours at Oxford. What with his incense burning, his weakness for mummies, and the scandal about women, it was rather a wonder he wasn't sent down. But what's he been up to?"

"Listen!" Cairn bent forward urgently. "You may remember that I once met a girl at the foot of his stairs—a pretty girl, obviously in deep trouble."

Sime nodded.

"I know," he said. "She afterward died at Bart's, while I was there. Apparently strangulation, although the nurse was within call."

He paused, staring in his dull fashion at Cairn.

"Sir Michael Ferrara died like that," said the latter slowly.

"Ferrara's adoptive father?"

"Yes. Myra—Myra Duquesne, Sir

Michael's niece—has a strange tale to tell about the evening before his death. But, good God, why do I talk about it? I cannot hope to make you understand."

Sime was unemotional, but there was concern in his voice and in his glance, for the change in Cairn was startling. Although he knew something, if but little, of certain happenings in London—gruesome happenings centering around the man called Antony Ferrara—he decided to avoid any further reference to them at the moment.

II

SEATED upon the terrace, Robert Cairn studied the busy life in the street below with all the interest of a new arrival in the chief city of Africa. More than ever, now, his illness and the things which had led up to it seemed to belong to a remote dream existence.

Through the railings at his feet a hawk-er was thrusting fly whisks, and imploring him in complicated English to purchase one. Venders of beads, of fictitious antiques, of sweetmeats, of what not; fortune tellers, and all that chattering horde which some obscure process of gravitation seems to hurl against the terrace of Shepherd's, buzzed about him.

Carriages and motor cars, camels and donkeys, mingled in the Sharia Kamel Pasha. Voices American, voices Anglo-Saxon, guttural German tones, and softly murmured Arabic merged into one indescribable chord of sound; but to Robert Cairn it was all unspeakably restful. He was quite contented to sit there sipping his whisky and soda and smoking his pipe. Sheer idleness was good for him and exactly what he wanted, and idling amid that unique throng is idleness *de luxe*.

Sime watched his friend covertly, and saw that Cairn's face had acquired lines—lines which told of the fires through which he had passed. Something, it was evident—something horrible—had seared his mind. Considering his many indications of tremendous nervous disaster, Sime wondered how near Cairn had come to insanity. He concluded that his friend had stood upon the frontiers of that grim land of phantoms, and had only been plucked back in the eleventh hour.

Cairn glanced around, with a smile, from the group of hawkers who solicited his attention upon the pavement below.

"This is a delightful scene," he said.

"I could sit here for hours; but considering that it's some time after sunset, it remains unusually hot, doesn't it?"

"Rather!" replied Sime. "They are expecting khamsin—the hot wind from the desert, you know. I was up the river a week ago, and we struck it badly in Assuan. It grew as black as night, and one couldn't breathe for sand. It's probably working down to Cairo."

"From your description I am not at all anxious to make the acquaintance of khamsin."

Sime shook his head, knocking out his pipe into the ash tray.

"This is a funny country," he said reflectively. "The most weird ideas prevail here to this day—ideas which properly belong to the Middle Ages. For instance"—he began to recharge the hot bowl—"khamsin does not usually come so early in the season, and the natives feel called upon to hunt up some explanation of its unexpected appearance. Their ideas on the subject are interesting, if idiotic. One of our Arabs—we are excavating in the Fayum, you know—solemnly assured me yesterday that the hot wind had been caused by an afreet, a sort of Arabian Nights demon, who has arrived in Egypt!"

He laughed gruffly, but Cairn was staring at him with a curious expression.

"When I got to Cairo this evening," continued Sime, "I found that news of the afreet had preceded me. Honestly, Cairn, it is all over the town—the native town, I mean. All the shopkeepers in the Muski are talking about it. If a puff of khamsin should come, I believe they would permanently shut up shop and hide in their cellars—if they have any, for I am rather hazy on modern Egyptian architecture."

Cairn nodded his head absently.

"You laugh," he said, "but the active force of a superstition—what we call a superstition—is sometimes a terrible thing."

Sime stared. The medical man had suddenly come uppermost, and he recollected that this sort of discussion was probably taboo.

"You may doubt the existence of afreets," continued Cairn, "but neither you nor I can doubt the creative power of thought. If a trained hypnotist, by sheer concentration, can persuade his subject that the latter sits upon the brink of a river fishing when actually he sits upon a platform in a lecture room, what result would

you expect from a concentration of thousands of native minds upon the idea that an afreet is abroad in Egypt?"

Sime still stared in a dull way peculiar to him.

"Rather a poser," he said. "I have a glimmer of a notion what you mean."

"Don't you think—"

"If you mean don't I think the result would be the creation of an afreet, no, I don't!"

"I hardly mean that, either," replied Cairn; "but this wave of superstition cannot be entirely without result. All that thought energy directed to one point—"

Sime stood up.

"We shall get out of our depth," he replied decisively.

He considered the ground of discussion an unhealthy one. This was the territory adjoining that of insanity.

A fortune teller from India proffered his services incessantly.

"*Imshi! Imshi!*" growled Sime.

"Hold on!" said Cairn, smiling. "This chap is not an Egyptian. Let us ask him if he has heard the rumor respecting the afreet."

Sime reseated himself rather unwillingly. The fortune teller spread his little carpet, and knelt down, in order to read the palm of his expected client; but Cairn waved him aside.

"I don't want my fortune told," he said; "but I will give you your fee"—with a smile at Sime—"for a few minutes' conversation."

"Yes, sir! Yes, sir!" The Indian was all attention.

"Why"—Cairn pointed forensically at the fortune teller—"why is khamsin coming so early this year?"

The Indian spread out his hands, palms upward.

"How should I know?" he replied in his soft, melodious voice. "I am not of Egypt. I can only say what is told to me by the Egyptians."

"And what is told to you?"

Sime rested his hands upon his knees, bending forward curiously. He was palpably anxious that Robert Cairn should have confirmation of the afreet story from the Indian.

"They tell me, sir"—the man's voice sank musically low—"that a thing very evil"—he tapped a long brown finger upon his breast—"not as I am"—he tapped

Sime upon the knee — “not as he, your friend”—he thrust the long finger at Cairn —“not as you, sir; not a man at all, though something like a man, not having any father and mother—”

“You mean,” suggested Sime, “a spirit?”

The fortune teller shook his head.

“They tell me, sir, not a spirit—a man, but not as other men; a very, very bad man; one that the great king, long, long ago, the king you call wise—”

“Solomon?” suggested Cairn.

“Yes, yes, Suleyman—one that he, when he banish all the tribe of the demons from earth—one that he not found.”

“One he overlooked?” jerked Sime.

“Yes, yes, overlook! A very evil man, my gentlemen. They tell me he has come to Egypt. He come not from the sea, but across the great desert—”

“The Libyan Desert?” suggested Sime.

The man shook his head, seeking for words.

“The Arabian Desert?”

“No, no! Away beyond, far up in Africa”—he waved his long arms dramatically—“far, far to the west, beyond the Sudan.”

“The Sahara Desert?” proposed Sime.

“Yes, yes! He is from the Sahara Desert. He journeys across the Sahara Desert, and is come to Khartum.”

“How did he get there?” asked Cairn.

The Indian shrugged his shoulders.

“I cannot say, but next he come to Wady Halfa, then he is in Assuan, and from Assuan he come down to Luxor. Yesterday an Egyptian friend told me khamsin is in the Fayum. Therefore he is there—the man of evil—for he bring the hot wind with him.”

The Indian was growing impressive, and two American tourists stopped to listen to his words.

“To-night—to-morrow”—he spoke almost in a whisper, glancing about him as if apprehensive of being overheard—“he may be here, in Cairo, bringing with him the scorching breath of the desert—the scorpion wind!”

He stood up, casting off the mystery with which he had invested his story, and smiling insinuatingly. His work was done; his fee was due. Sime rewarded him with five piasters, and he departed, bowing.

Cairn began to speak, staring absently the while after the fortune teller, as the

Indian descended the carpeted steps and rejoined the heterogeneous throng on the sidewalk below.

“You know, Sime, if a man could take advantage of such a wave of thought as this which is now sweeping through Egypt—if he could cause it to concentrate upon him, as it were—don’t you think that it would enable him to transcend the normal, to do phenomenal things?”

“By what process would you propose to make yourself such a focus?”

“I was speaking impersonally, Sime. It might be possible—”

“It might be possible to dress for dinner,” snapped Sime, “if we shut up talking nonsense! There’s a carnival masquerade here to-night—great fun. Suppose we concentrate our brain waves on another Scotch and soda?”

III

ABOVE the palm trees swept the jeweled vault of Egypt’s sky, and set amid the clustering leaves gleamed little red electric lamps. Fairy lanterns outlined the winding paths, and paper Japanese lamps hung dancing in long rows, while in the center of the enchanted garden a fountain threw its diamond spray high in the air, to fall back coolly plashing into the marble home of the golden carp. The rustling of innumerable feet upon the sandy pathway, and the ceaseless murmur of voices, with pealing laughter rising above all, could be heard amid the strains of the military band ensconced in a flower-covered arbor.

Into the brightly lighted places and back into the luminous shadows came and went fantastic forms. Sheiks there were with flowing robes, dragomans who spoke no Arabic, sultans and priests of ancient Egypt, going arm in arm. Dancing girls of old Thebes, harem ladies in silken trousers and red shoes, queens of Babylon and Palmyra, geishas from far-away Japan, and desert gypsies mingled like specks revolving in a giant kaleidoscope.

The thick carpet of confetti rustled to the tread. Girls ran screaming before those who pursued them armed with handfuls of the tiny paper disks. Pipers of a Highland regiment marched through the throng, their Scottish kilts seeming wildly incongruous amid such a scene. Within the hotel, where the mosque lanterns glowed, one might catch a glimpse of the heads of dancers gliding shadowlike.

"A tremendous crowd," said Sime, "considering that it is nearly the end of the season."

Three silken ladies wearing gauzy white yashmaks confronted Cairn and the speaker. Suddenly there was a gleaming of jeweled fingers, and Cairn found himself half choked with confetti, which filled his eyes, his nose, and his ears, and some of which found access to his mouth. The three ladies of the yashmak ran screaming from their vengeance-seeking victims, Sime pursuing two, and Cairn hard upon the heels of the third.

Amid this scene of riotous carnival all else was forgotten, and only the infectious madness of the night claimed his mind. In and out of the strangely attired groups darted his agile quarry, all but captured a score of times, but always eluding him. He had hopelessly lost Sime, as he leaped around fountain and flower bed, arbor and palm trunk, in hot pursuit of the elusive yashmak.

Then, in a shadowed corner of the garden, he trapped her. Plunging his hand into his own bag of confetti, he was about to take his revenge, when a sudden gust of wind passed sibilantly through the palm tops, and, glancing upward, Cairn saw that the blue sky was overcast and the stars were gleaming dimly, as through a veil. That moment of hesitancy proved fatal, for with a little excited scream the girl dived under his outstretched arm and fled back toward the fountain.

He turned to pursue again, when a second puff of wind, stronger than the first, set the palm fronds waving and showered dry leaves upon the confetti carpet of the garden. The band played loudly, the murmur of conversation rose to something like a roar, but above it whistled the increasing breeze, and there was a sort of grittiness in the air.

Then, proclaimed by a furious lashing of the fronds above, the wind burst in all its fury. It seemed to beat down into the garden in waves of heat. Huge leaves began to fall from the tree tops, and the mast-like trunks bent before the fury from the desert. The atmosphere grew hazy with impalpable dust, and the stars were wholly obscured.

Commenced a stampede from the garden. A woman's scream, shrill with fear, rose from the heart of the throng:

"A scorpion! A scorpion!"

Panic threatened, but fortunately the doors were wide, so that the whole fantastic company passed into the hotel without disaster; and even the military band retired. Cairn perceived that he alone remained in the garden. Glancing along the path in the direction of the fountain, he saw a blotchy drab creature, about four inches in length, running zigzag toward him. It was a poisonous scorpion; but, even as he leaped forward to crush it, it turned and crept in amid the tangle of flowers beside the path, where it was lost from view.

The scorching wind grew momentarily more fierce. Cairn, entering behind a few straggling revelers, found something ominous and dreadful in its sudden fury. At the threshold he turned and looked back upon the gayly lighted garden.

The paper lamps were thrashing in the wind. Many of them were extinguished; others were in flames. A number of electric globes fell from their fastenings amid the palm tops, and burst like bombs upon the ground. The pleasure garden was a battlefield, beset with dangers, and he fully appreciated the anxiety of the company to get within doors. Where chrysanthemum and yashmak, turban and tarboosh, Egyptian crest and Indian plume, had mingled so gayly, no soul remained; but yet—he was in error—some one did remain!

As if embodying the fear that in a few short minutes had emptied the garden, out beneath the waving lanterns, the flying débris, the whirling dust, pacing somberly from shadow to light, and from light to shadow again, advancing toward the hotel steps, came the figure of one sandaled and wearing the short white tunic of ancient Egypt. His arms were bare, and he carried a long staff; but rising hideously upon his shoulders was a crocodile mask, which seemed to grin—the mask of Set, Set the Destroyer, god of the underworld.

Cairn, alone of all the crowd, saw the strange figure, for the reason that Cairn alone faced toward the garden. The gruesome mask seemed to fascinate him. He could not take his gaze from it. He felt hypnotically impelled to stare at the gleaming eyes set in the saurian head.

The mask was at the foot of the steps, and still Cairn stood rigid. As the sandaled foot was set upon the first step, a breeze, dust-laden, and hot as from a furnace door, blew into the hotel, blinding

him. A chorus arose from the crowd at his back, and many voices cried out for doors to be shut. Some one tapped him on the shoulder, and spun him about.

"By God!" It was Sime who had him by the arm. "Khamsin has come with a vengeance! They tell me that they have never had anything like it!"

The native servants were closing and fastening the doors. The night was now as black as Erebus, and the wind was howling about the building with the voices of a million lost souls. Cairn glanced back across his shoulder. Men were hastily drawing heavy curtains across the doors and windows.

"They have shut him out, Sime!" he said.

Sime stared in his dull fashion.

"You surely saw him?" persisted Cairn irritably. "You must have seen the man in the mask of Set. He was coming in just behind me."

Sime strode forward, pulled the curtains aside, and peered out into the deserted garden.

"Not a soul, old man!" he declared. "You must have seen the afreet!"

IV

THE sudden and appalling change of weather had sadly affected the mood of the gathering. The part of the carnival that was to have taken place in the garden was perforce abandoned, together with the fireworks display. A half-hearted attempt was made at dancing, but the howling of the wind, and the omnipresent dust, perpetually reminded the pleasure seekers that khamsin raged without—raged with a violence unparalleled in the experience of the oldest residents. This was a full-fledged sand storm—a terror of the Sahara descended upon Cairo.

But there were few departures, although many of the visitors who had long distances to go discussed the advisability of leaving before the storm should have grown even worse. The general tendency, though, was markedly gregarious. Safety seemed to be with the crowd, amid the gayety, where music and laughter were, rather than in the sand-swept streets.

"Guess we've outstayed our welcome," confided an American lady to Sime. "Egypt wants to drive us all home now."

"Possibly," he replied, with a smile. "The season has run very late this year,

and so this sort of thing is more or less to be expected."

The orchestra struck up a lively one-step, and a few of the more enthusiastic dancers accepted the invitation, but most of the company thronged around the edge of the floor, acting as spectators.

Cairn and Sime wedged a way through the heterogeneous crowd to the American bar.

"I prescribe a tango," said Sime.

"A tango is—"

"A tango," explained Sime, "is a new kind of cocktail sacred to this buffet. Try it. It will either kill you or cure you."

Cairn smiled rather wanly.

"I must confess that I need bucking up a bit," he said. "That confounded sand seems to have got me by the throat."

Sime briskly gave his orders to the bar attendant.

"You know," pursued Cairn, "I cannot get out of my head the idea that there was some one wearing a crocodile mask in the garden a while ago."

"Look here!" growled Sime, studying the operations of the cocktail manufacturer. "Suppose there were—what about it?"

"Well, it's odd that nobody else saw him."

"I suppose it hasn't occurred to you that the fellow might possibly have removed his mask?"

Cairn shook his head slowly.

"I don't think so," he declared. "I haven't seen him anywhere in the hotel."

"Seen him?" Sime turned his dull gaze upon the speaker. "How should you know him?"

Cairn raised his hand to his forehead in an oddly helpless way.

"No, of course not—but the whole thing is very extraordinary!"

They took their seats at a small table, and in mutual silence loaded and lighted their pipes.

Sime, in common with many young and enthusiastic medical men, had theories—theories of that revolutionary sort which only harsh experience can shatter. Secretly he was disposed to ascribe all the ills to which flesh is heir primarily to a disordered nervous system. It was evident that Cairn's mind persistently ran along a particular groove. Something lay behind all this erratic talk; he had clearly invested the crocodile mask of Set with a curious individuality.

"I gather that you had a stiff bout of it in London?" Sime said suddenly.

Cairn nodded.

"Beastly stiff! There's a lot of sound reason in your nervous theory, Sime. It was touch and go with me for days, I am told; yet, pathologically, I was a hale man. That would seem to show how nerves can kill. Just a series of shocks and horrors, one piled upon another, did as much for me as influenza, pneumonia, and two or three other ailments together could have done."

Sime shook his head wisely. This was quite in accordance with his own ideas.

"You know Antony Ferrara?" continued Cairn. "Well, he has done this for me. His damnable practices are worse than any disease. Sime, the man is a pestilence! Although the law cannot touch him, although no jury can convict him, he is a murderer. He controls forces—"

Sime was watching his friend intently.

"It will give you some idea, Sime, of the pitch to which things had come, when I tell you that my father drove to Ferrara's rooms, one night, with a loaded revolver in his pocket."

"For"—Sime hesitated—"for his own protection?"

"No!" Cairn leaned forward across the table. "To shoot the fellow, Sime—to shoot him on sight, as one shoots a mad dog!"

"Are you serious?"

"As God is my witness, if Antony Ferrara had been in his rooms that night, my father would have killed him!"

"It would have been a most shocking scandal!"

"It would have been an act of self-devotion. The man who removes Antony Ferrara from the earth will be doing mankind a service worthy of the highest reward. He is unfit to live. Sometimes I cannot believe that he does live; I expect to wake up and find that he was a figure of a particularly evil dream."

"This incident—the call at his rooms—occurred just before your illness?"

"The thing which he had attempted that night was the last straw, Sime. It broke me down. From the time that he left Oxford, Antony Ferrara has pursued a deliberate course of crime—of crime so cunning, so unusual, and based upon such amazing and unholy knowledge, that no breath of suspicion has touched him.

Sime, you remember a girl I told you about at Oxford one evening—a girl who came to visit him?"

Sime nodded slowly.

"Well, he killed her. Oh, there is no doubt about it! I saw her body in the hospital."

"How had he killed her, then?"

"How? Only he and the God who permits him to exist can answer that, Sime. He killed her without coming anywhere near her. He killed his adoptive father, Sir Michael Ferrara, by the same unholy means."

Sime watched his companion, but offered no comment.

"It was hushed up, of course. There is no existing law which could be used against him."

"Existing law?"

"They are ruled out, Sime, the laws that could have reached him; but in the Middle Ages he would have been burned at the stake."

"I see!" Sime drummed his fingers upon the table. "You had those ideas about him at Oxford. Does Dr. Cairn seriously believe the same thing?"

"He does. So would you—you could not doubt it, Sime, not for a moment, if you had seen what we have seen!" Cairn's eyes blazed into a sudden fury, suggestive of his old robust self. "He tried night after night, by means of the same accursed sorcery, which every one thought buried in the ruins of Thebes, to kill me. He projected—things—"

"Suggested these—things, to your mind?"

"Something like that. I saw, or thought I saw, and smelled—pah, I seem to smell them now—beetles, mummy beetles, you know, from the skull of a mummy! My rooms were thick with them. It brought me very near to Bedlam, Sime. Oh, it was not merely imaginary! My father and I caught him red-handed." He glanced across at the other. "You read of the death of Lord Lashmore? It was just after you came out."

"Yes—heart."

"It was his heart—yes, but Ferrara was responsible. That was the business which led my father to drive to Ferrara's rooms with a loaded revolver in his pocket."

The wind was shaking the windows and whistling about the building with demoniacal fury, as if seeking admission. The

band played a popular waltz; and in and out of the open doors came and went groups of men and women costumed to represent many ages of history and many nationalities.

"Ferrara," began Sime slowly, "was always a detestable man, with his sleek black hair and ivory face. Those long eyes of his had an expression which always tempted me to hit him. Sir Michael, if what you say is true—and after all, Cairn, it only goes to show how little we know of the nervous system—literally took a viper to his bosom."

"He did. Antony Ferrara was his adopted son, of course; God knows to what evil brood he really belongs."

Both were silent for a while.

"Gracious Heavens!" cried Cairn suddenly, starting to his feet so wildly as almost to upset the table. "Look, Sime! Look!"

V

SIME was not the only man in the bar to hear and to heed Cairn's words. Looking in the direction indicated by his friend's extended finger, Sime received a vague impression that a grotesque, long-headed figure had appeared momentarily in the doorway opening into the room where the dancers were. Then it was gone again, if it had ever been there, and he was supporting Cairn, who swayed dizzily and had become ghastly pale.

Sime imagined that the heated air had grown even more heated. Curious eyes were turned upon his companion, who now sank back into his chair, muttering:

"The mask! The mask!"

"I think I saw the chap who seems to worry you so much," said Sime soothingly. "Wait here. I will tell the waiter to bring you a dose of brandy. Whatever you do, don't get excited."

He made for the door, pausing and giving an order to a waiter on his way, and pushed into the crowd outside. It was long past midnight, and the gayety, which had been resumed, seemed of a forced and feverish sort. Some of the masqueraders were leaving, and a breath of hot wind swept in from the open doors.

A pretty girl wearing a yashmak, who, with two similarly attired companions, was making her way to the entrance, attracted Sime's attention, for she seemed to be on the point of swooning. He recognized the

trio as the three girls who had pelted Cairn and himself with confetti earlier in the evening.

"The sudden heat has affected your friend," he said, stepping up to them. "My name is Dr. Sime; may I offer you my assistance?"

The offer was accepted, and with the three he passed out upon the terrace, where the dust grated beneath the tread, and helped the fainting girl into an arabiyyeh. The night was thunderously black, the heat was almost insufferable, and the tall palms in front of the hotel swayed as if in torture before the might of the scorching wind.

As the vehicle drove off, Sime stood for a moment looking after it. His face was very grave, for there was a look in the bright eyes of the girl in the yashmak which, professionally, he did not like. Turning up the steps, he learned from the manager of the hotel that several visitors had succumbed to the heat. There was something furtive in the manner of his informant's glance, and Sime looked at him significantly.

"Khamzin brings clouds of septic dust with it," he said. "Let us hope that these attacks are due to nothing more than the unexpected rise in the temperature."

An air of uneasiness prevailed throughout the hotel. The wind had considerably abated, and crowds were leaving, pouring from the steps into the deserted street, a dreamlike company.

Colonel Royland took Sime aside, as the latter was making his way back to the buffet. The colonel, whose regiment was stationed at the Citadel, had known Sime almost from childhood.

"You know, my boy," he said, "I should never have allowed Eileen"—his daughter—"to remain in Cairo, if I had foreseen this change in the weather. This infernal wind, coming right through the native town, is loaded with infection."

"Has it affected her, then?" asked Sime anxiously.

"She nearly fainted in the ballroom," replied the colonel. "Her mother took her home half an hour ago. I looked for you everywhere, but couldn't find you."

"Quite a number have succumbed, I hear," said Sime.

"Eileen seemed to be slightly hysterical," continued the colonel. "She persisted that some one wearing a crocodile mask

had been standing beside her at the moment when she was taken ill."

Sime started. Perhaps Cairn's story of the hideous mask was not a matter of mere imagination, after all.

"There is some one here dressed like that, I believe," he replied, with affected carelessness. "He seems to have frightened several people. Any idea who he might be?"

"My dear chap," cried the colonel, "I have been searching the place for him, but I have never once set eyes upon him. I was about to ask if you knew anything about him."

Sime returned to the table where Cairn was sitting. The latter seemed to have recovered somewhat, but he looked far from well. Sime stared at him critically.

"I should turn in," he said, "if I were you. Khamsin is playing the deuce with people. I only hope it does not justify its name, and blow for fifty days!"

"Have you seen the man in the mask?" asked Cairn.

"No," replied Sime; "but he's here, all right, for others have seen him."

Cairn stood up rather unsteadily, and, with Sime, made his way through the moving crowd to the stairs. The band was still playing, but the cloud of gloom and fear which had settled upon the place refused to be dissipated.

"Good night, Cairn," said Sime. "See you in the morning."

Robert Cairn, with an aching head and a growing sensation of nausea, paused on the landing, looking down into the court below. He could not disguise from himself that he felt ill—not nervously ill, as in London, but physically sick. This superheated air, which seemed to rise in waves from below, was difficult to breathe.

Then, from a weary glancing at the figures beneath him, his attitude changed to one of tense watching. A man, wearing the crocodile mask of Set, stood by a huge urn containing a palm, looking up to the landing!

Cairn's weakness left him, and in its place came an indescribable anger, a longing to drive his fist into that grinning mask. He turned and ran lightly down the stairs, conscious of a sudden glow of energy.

Reaching the floor, he saw the mask making across the hall, in the direction of the outer door. As rapidly as possible, for he could not run without attracting un-

desirable attention, Cairn followed. The figure of Set passed out upon the terrace; but when Cairn in turn swung open the door, his quarry had vanished.

Then, in an arabiyyeh just driving off, he detected the hideous mask. Hatless as he was, he hurried down the steps to the street and threw himself into another vehicle. The carriage controller was in attendance, and Cairn rapidly told him to instruct the driver to follow the arabiyyeh which had just left.

The man lashed up his horses, turned his carriage, and went galloping on after the retreating figure. Past the Esbekiya Gardens they went, through several narrow streets, and on to the quarter of the Muski. Time after time Cairn thought he had lost the carriage ahead, but his driver's knowledge of the tortuous streets always enabled him to overtake it again.

They went rocking past empty shops and unlighted houses, along lanes so narrow that with outstretched arms one could almost have touched the walls on either side. Cairn had not the remotest idea of his whereabouts, save that he was evidently in the district of the bazaars. A right-angled corner was abruptly negotiated—and there, ahead of him, stood the pursued vehicle. The driver was turning his horses around, to return. His fare was disappearing from sight into the black shadows of a narrow alley on the left.

Cairn leaped from his arabiyyeh, shouting to the man to wait, and went dashing down the sloping lane after the retreating figure. A sort of blind fury possessed him, but he never paused to analyze it, never asked himself by what right he pursued the wearer of the mask, and what wrong the man had done him. His action was wholly unreasoning. He only knew that he wished to overtake this masquerader and to tear his disguise from him.

He discovered that, despite the tropical heat of the night, he was shuddering with cold; but he disregarded this circumstance and ran on.

The pursued stopped before an iron-studded door, which was opened instantly. As he entered, the runner came up with him, and, before the door could be reclosed, Cairn thrust his way in.

Blackness, utter blackness, was before him. The figure which he had pursued seemed to have been swallowed up. He stumbled on, gropingly, hands outstretched,

then fell—fell, as he realized in the moment of falling, down a short flight of stone steps.

Still amid utter blackness, he got upon his feet, shaken but otherwise unhurt by his fall. He turned about, expecting to see some glimmer of light from the stairway, but the blackness was unbroken. Silence and gloom hemmed him in. He stood for a moment, listening intently.

A shaft of light pierced the darkness, as a shutter was thrown open. Through an iron-barred window the light shone; and with the light came a breath of a peculiar and stifling perfume. That perfume carried his imagination back instantly to a room at Oxford.

He advanced and looked through into the place beyond. He drew a swift breath, clutched the bars, and was silent—stricken speechless.

He looked into a large and lofty room, lighted by several hanging lamps. It had a carpeted divan at one end, but was otherwise scantily furnished, in the Eastern manner. A silver incense burner smoked upon a large prayer carpet, and by it stood the man in the crocodile mask.

An Arab girl, fantastically attired, who had evidently just opened the shutters, was now helping the man to remove the hideous headdress. She presently untied the last of the fastenings and lifted the thing from his shoulders, moving away with the gliding step of the Oriental, and leaving him standing there in his short white tunic, bare-legged and sandaled.

The smoke of the incense curled upward and played around the straight, slender figure, drew vaporous lines about the still, ivory face—a handsome, sinister face—sometimes partly veiling the long black eyes, and sometimes showing them in all their unnatural brightness. So the man stood, looking toward the barred window.

It was Antony Ferrara.

"Ah, dear Cairn!" The husky but musical voice smote upon Cairn's ears as the most hated sound in nature. "So you have followed me to Egypt. Not content with driving me from London, you would also render Cairo—my dear Cairo—untenable for me."

Cairn clutched the bars, but was silent.

"How wrong of you, Cairn!" the soft voice mocked. "This attention is so harmful—to you. Do you know, Cairn, that the Sudanese formed the extraordinary idea that I was an afreet, and that this strange repu-

tation has followed me right down the Nile? Your father, my dear friend, has studied these odd matters, and he would tell you that there is no power in nature higher than the human will. Actually, Cairn, they have ascribed to me the control of khamsin; and so many worthy Egyptians have made up their minds that I travel with the storm, or that the storm follows me, that something of the kind has really come to pass! Or is it merely coincidence, Cairn? Who can say?"

Motionless, immobile, save for a slow smile, Antony Ferrara stood, while Cairn kept his eyes upon the evil face, and with trembling hands clutched the bars.

"It is certainly odd, is it not," resumed the taunting voice, "that khamsin—so violent, too—should thus descend upon the Cairene season? I arrived from the Fayum only this evening, Cairn, and, do you know, they have the pestilence there! I trust the hot wind does not carry it to Cairo! There are so many distinguished European and American visitors here that it would be a thousand pities!"

Cairn released his grip of the bars, raised his clenched fists above his head, and in a voice and with a maniacal fury that were not his own, cursed the man who stood there mocking him. Then he reeled, fell, and remembered no more.

VI

"ALL right, old man! You'll do quite nicely now."

It was Sime speaking. Cairn struggled upright, and found himself in bed, with his friend seated beside him.

"Don't talk," said Sime. "You're in the hospital. I'll do the talking; you listen. I saw you bolt out of Shepheard's last night. Shut up! I followed, but lost you. We got up a search party, and, with the aid of the man who had driven you, we ran you to earth in a dirty alley behind the mosque of El Azhar. Four kindly mendicants, who reside upon the steps of the establishment, had been awakened by your blundering in among them. They were holding you—yes, you were raving pretty badly. You are a lucky man, Cairn. You were inoculated before you left home?"

Cairn nodded weakly.

"Saved you! Be all right in a couple of days. That damned khamsin has brought a whiff of the plague from somewhere. Curiously enough, more than half of the

cases reported so far are people who were at the carnival. Some of them, Cairn—but we won't discuss that now. I was afraid of it last night; that's why I kept my eye

on you. My boy, you were delirious when you bolted out of the hotel."

"Was I?" said Cairn wearily, and lay back on the pillow. "Perhaps I was!"

SECOND MYSTERY—THE LAIR OF THE SPIDERS

DR. BRUCE CAIRN stepped into the boat which was to take him ashore. As it swung away from the side of the liner, he sought to divert his thoughts by a contemplation of the weird scene.

Amid the smoky flare of many lights, amid rising clouds of dust, a line of laden toilers was crawling, like ants, from the lighters into the bowels of the big ship, while a second line, unladen, was descending by another gangway. Above, the jeweled velvet of the sky swept in a glorious arc. Beyond, the lights of Port Said broke through the black curtain of the night, and the moving ray from the lighthouse intermittently swept the harbor waters, while amid the indescribable clamor, the grimly picturesque turmoil, so characteristic of the place, the liner took in coal for her run to Rangoon.

Dodging this way and that, rounding the sterns of big ships, and disputing the waterway with lesser craft, the boat made for shore.

The usual delay at the customhouse, the usual soothing of the excited officials in the usual way, and his arabyeh was jolting Dr. Cairn through the noise and the smell of those rambling streets—a noise and a smell peculiar to this modern Egyptian town, the clearing house of the Near East.

He accepted the room which was offered to him at the hotel, without troubling to inspect it. Having left instructions that he was to be called in time for the early train to Cairo, he swallowed a whisky and soda at the buffet, and wearily ascended the stairs.

There were tourists in the hotel, English and American, marked by a gaping wonderment, and loud with plans of sight-seeing; but Port Said—nay, all Egypt—had nothing of novelty to offer Dr. Cairn. He was there at great inconvenience. A practitioner of his repute may not easily arrange to quit London at a moment's notice; but the business upon which he had come was imperative. For him the charm of the place had no existence, but somewhere in

Egypt his son stood in deadly peril, and Dr. Cairn counted the hours that yet divided them.

His soul was up in arms against the man whose evil schemes had led to his presence in Port Said, at a time when many sufferers required his ministrations in Half Moon Street. He was haunted by a phantom, a ghoul in human shape—Antony Ferrara, the adopted son of his dear friend, the adopted son who had brought about the death of his adoptive father.

Dr. Cairn switched on the light and seated himself upon the side of the bed, knitting his brows and staring straight before him, with an expression in his clear gray eyes whose significance he would have denied hotly, had any man charged him with it. He was thinking of Antony Ferrara's record. The victims of this fiendish youth—for Antony was barely of age—seemed to stand before him with hands stretched out appealingly.

"You alone," they seemed to cry, "know what he is! You alone know of our cruel wrongs! You alone can avenge them!"

And yet he had hesitated. It had remained for his own flesh and blood to be threatened ere he had begun to take decisive action.

The viper had lain within his reach, and he had neglected to set his heel upon it. Men and women had suffered and had died of its venom, and he had not crushed it. Then Robert, his son, had felt the poison fang, and Dr. Cairn, who had hesitated to act in behalf of all humanity, had leaped to arms. He charged himself with a parent's selfishness, and his conscience would hear no defense.

In spirit he stood again in a small room overlooking Piccadilly. The walls and the ceiling were entirely covered by a fretwork in sandalwood, oriental in workmanship. In niches, or doorless cupboards, stood curious-looking vases and pots. Heavy curtains of rich fabric draped the doors. The floor was of mosaic, and a small fountain played in the center.

A cushioned divan occupied one side of the room, from which natural light was entirely excluded and which was illuminated only by an ornate lantern swung from the ceiling. This lantern had panes of blue glass producing a singular effect. A silver incense burner stood near to one corner of the divan and emitted a subtle perfume.

He passed, in fancy, to Antony Ferrara's study. It was an elaborated copy of Ferrara's room at Oxford—ininitely more spacious, of course, and, by reason of the rugs, cushions, and carpets with which its floor was strewn, suggestive of great opulence; but the littered table was there, with its nameless instruments and its extraordinary silver lamp. The mummies were there; the antique volumes, the rolls of papyrus, the preserved snakes and cats and ibises, the statuettes of Isis, Osiris, and other Nile deities were there. There, too, were the many photographs of women; and, above all, there was Antony Ferrara.

The turmoil from the harbor reached Dr. Cairn faintly where he sat. He listened dully to the hooting of a siren—that of some vessel coming out of the Suez Canal. His thoughts were evil company. With a deep sigh, he rose, crossed the room, and threw open the double windows giving access to the balcony.

Port Said, a panorama of twinkling lights, lay beneath him. The beam from the lighthouse swept the town searchingly, like the eye of some pagan god lustful for sacrifice. He imagined that he could hear the shouting of the gangs coaling the liner in the harbor; but the night was full of the remote murmuring inseparable from that gateway of the East.

The streets below, white under the moon, looked empty and deserted, and the hotel beneath him gave no sound to tell of the many birds of passage who sheltered within it. A stunning sense of his loneliness came to Dr. Cairn. His physical loneliness was symbolic of that which characterized his place in the world. He alone had the knowledge and the power to crush Antony Ferrara. He alone could rid the world of the unnatural menace embodied in the man bearing that name.

The town lay beneath his eyes, but now he saw nothing of it. Before his mental vision loomed the figure of a slender and strangely handsome young man, having jet-black, lusterless hair, a face of uniform

ivory hue, long, dark eyes wherein lurked lambent fires, and a womanish grace expressed in his whole bearing and emphasized by his long white hands. Upon a finger of the left hand gleamed a strange green stone.

Antony Ferrara! In the eyes of this solitary traveler, who stood looking down upon Port Said, that figure filled the entire landscape of Egypt.

With a weary sigh, Dr. Cairn turned and began to undress. Leaving the windows open, he switched off the light and got into bed. He was very weary, with a weariness rather of the spirit than of the flesh—a weariness of that sort which renders sleep all but impossible. Around and about one fixed point his thoughts circled. In vain he endeavored to forget, for a while, Antony Ferrara and the things connected with him.

Sleep was imperative, if he would be in fit condition to cope with the matters which demanded his attention in Cairo; yet sleep defied him. Every trifling sound from the harbor and the canal seemed to rise upon the still air to his room. Through a sort of mist created by the mosquito curtains, he could see the open windows, and look out upon the stars. He found himself studying the heavens with sleepless eyes, and idly working out the constellations visible.

Then one very bright star attracted the whole of his attention. With the dogged persistency of insomnia, he sought to place it, but he could not determine to which group it belonged; so he lay with his eyes upon the stars until the other veiled lamps of heaven became invisible, and the patch of sky no more than a setting for that one white orb.

In this contemplation he grew restless. His thoughts ceased feverishly to race along that one hateful groove. The bright star seemed to soothe him.

As a result of his fixed gazing, it now appeared to have increased in size. This was a common optical delusion, upon which he scarcely speculated at all. He recognized the welcome approach of sleep, and deliberately concentrated his mind upon the globe of light.

Yes, a globe of light indeed, for now it had assumed the dimensions of a lesser moon, and it seemed to rest in the space between the open windows. Then Dr. Cairn thought that it crept still nearer.

The realities—the bed, the mosquito curtain, the room—were fading. Grateful slumber approached, and weighed upon his eyes in the form of that dazzling globe.

The feeling of contentment was the last impression that he had, ere, with the bright star seemingly suspended just beyond the netting, he slept.

II

A MAN mentally overtired either sleeps dreamlessly, or dreams with a vividness greater than that of the visions of normal slumber. Dr. Cairn dreamed a vivid dream.

He fancied that he was awakened by the sound of a gentle rapping. Opening his eyes, he peered through the cloudy netting. Then he started up and wrenched back the curtain.

The rapping was repeated; and, peering again across the room, he very distinctly perceived a figure upon the balcony by the open window. It was that of a woman who wore the black silk dress and the white yashmak of the Moslem, and who was bending forward, looking into the room.

"Who is there?" he called. "What do you want?"

"S-sh!"

The woman raised her hand to her veiled lips, and looked right and left, as if fearing to disturb the occupants of the adjacent rooms.

Dr. Cairn reached out for his dressing gown, which lay upon the chair beside the bed, threw it over his shoulders, and stepped out upon the floor. He stooped and put on his slippers, never taking his eyes from the figure at the window. The room was flooded with moonlight.

He began to walk toward the balcony, when the mysterious visitor spoke.

"You are Dr. Cairn?"

The words were uttered in the language of dreams—that is to say that although he understood them perfectly, he knew that they had not been spoken in the English language, nor in any language known to him; yet, as is the way with one who dreams, he had understood.

"I am he," he said. "Who are you?"

"Make no noise, but follow me quickly. Some one is very ill."

There was sincerity in the appeal, voiced in the softest, most silvery tone he had ever heard. He stood beside the veiled woman, and met the glance of her dark eyes with a consciousness of some magnetic force in

the glance, which seemed to set his nerves quivering.

"Why do you come to the window? How do you know—"

The visitor again raised her hand to her lips. It was of a gleaming ivory color, and the long, tapering fingers were laden with singular jewelry—exquisite enamel work, which Cairn knew to be ancient Egyptian, but which did not seem out of place in this dream adventure.

"I was afraid to make any unnecessary disturbance," she replied. "Please do not delay, but come at once."

Dr. Cairn adjusted his dressing gown, and followed the veiled messenger along the balcony.

For a dream city, Port Said appeared remarkably substantial, as it spread out at his feet, its dingy buildings whitened by the moonlight; but his progress was dream-like, for he seemed to glide past many windows and around the corner of the building. Without having consciously exerted any physical effort, he found his hands grasped by warm, jeweled fingers, found himself guided into some darkened room, and then, possessed by that doubting which sometimes comes in dreams, found himself hesitating.

The moonlight did not penetrate to the apartment in which he stood, and the darkness about him was impenetrable; but the clinging fingers did not release their hold. Vaguely aware that he was acting in a manner which might readily be misconstrued, he nevertheless allowed his unseen guide to lead him forward.

Stairs were descended in phantom silence—many stairs. The coolness of the air suggested that they were outside the hotel; but the darkness remained complete. Along what seemed to be a stone-paved passage the woman and the man advanced mysteriously. By this time Dr. Cairn was wholly resigned to the strangeness of his dream.

Then, although the place lay in blackest shadow, he saw that they were in the open air, for the starry sky swept above them.

It was a narrow street—at points, the buildings almost met above—wherein he now found himself. Had he been in possession of his usual faculties, he would have asked himself how this veiled woman had gained admittance to the hotel, and why she had secretly led him out from it; but the dreamer's mental lethargy possessed

him. With the blind faith of a child, he followed on.

He began vaguely to consider the personality of his guide. She seemed to be of no more than average height, but she carried herself with unusual grace, and her progress was marked by a certain hauteur. At the point where a narrow lane crossed that which they were following, the veiled figure was silhouetted for a moment against the light of the moon, and through the gauzy fabric Dr. Cairn perceived the outlines of a perfect shape.

His vague wonderment concerned itself now with the ivory, jewel-laden hands. His condition differed from the normal dream state, in that he was not entirely resigned to the anomalous. Misty doubts were forming in his darkened mind.

His dream guide paused before a heavy door of a typical native house—a house which once had been of some consequence, and which faced the entrance to a mosque. Indeed, it lay in the shadow of the minaret. The door was opened from within, although she gave no perceptible signal, and darkness, to Dr. Cairn's dulled perceptions, seemed to swallow them both up.

He had an impression of a trap raised, of stone steps descended, of a new darkness almost palpable. The gloom of the place affected him as a mental blank. When a bright light shone out, it seemed to mark the opening of a second dream phase.

Whence the light came, he knew not, cared not, but it illuminated a bare room, with a floor of native mud bricks, a plastered wall, and a wood-beamed ceiling. A tall sarcophagus stood upright against the wall before him. Its lid leaned close beside it—and his black robed guide, her luminous eyes looking straight over the yashmak, stood rigidly upright within it!

She raised her jeweled hands, and with a swift movement discarded robe and yashmak, and stood before him in the clinging draperies of an ancient queen, wearing the leopard skin and the crescent, and carrying the flail of royal Egypt!

Her pale face formed a perfect oval. Her long almond eyes had an evil beauty which seemed to chill, and her brilliantly red mouth was curved in a smile which must have made any man forget the evil in her eyes; but when we move in a dream world, our emotions, too, become dreamlike. She placed a sandaled foot upon the mud floor and stepped out of the sarcophagus, ad-

vancing toward Dr. Cairn, a vision of such sinful loveliness as he could never have conceived in his waking moments. In that strange dream language, in a tongue not of East nor West, she spoke; and her silvery voice had something of the tone of those Egyptian pipes whose dree fills the nights upon the Upper Nile—the seductive music of remote and splendid wickedness.

"You know me, now?" she whispered.

And in his dream she seemed to be a familiar figure, at once dreadful and worshipful.

A fitful light played through the darkness, and seemed to dance upon a curtain draped behind the sarcophagus, picking out diamond points. The dreamer groped in the mental chaos of his mind, and found a clew to the meaning of this. The diamond points were the eyes of thousands of tarantula spiders with which the curtain was brodered.

The sign of the spider! What did he know of it? Yes, of course—it was the secret mark of Egypt's witch queen—of the beautiful woman whose name, after her mysterious death, had been erased from all her monuments.

A sweet whisper stole to his ears:

"You will befriend him—befriend my son—for my sake?"

And in his dream state he found himself prepared to forswear all that he held holy, for her sake. She grasped both his hands, and her burning eyes looked closely into his.

"Your reward shall be a great one!" she whispered, still more softly.

III

THERE came a sudden blank, and Dr. Cairn found himself walking again through the narrow street, led by the veiled woman. His impressions were growing dim, and she seemed less real than hitherto. The streets were phantom streets, built of shadow stuff, and the stairs that he presently found himself ascending were unsubstantial. He seemed rather to float upward, until, with the jeweled fingers held fast in his own, he stood in a darkened apartment and saw before him an open window.

He knew that he was once more back in the hotel. A dim light dawned in the blackness of the room, and the musical voice breathed in his ear:

"Your reward shall be easily earned. I did but test you. Strike, and strike truly!"

The whisper grew sibilant — serpentine. Dr. Cairn felt the hilt of a dagger thrust into his right hand, and in the dim, mysterious light he looked down at one who lay in a bed close beside him.

At sight of the sleeper's face—the perfectly chiseled face, with the long black lashes resting on the ivory cheeks—he forgot all else, forgot the place wherein he stood, forgot his beautiful guide, and only remembered that he held a dagger in his hand, and that Antony Ferrara lay there, sleeping!

"Strike!" came the whisper again.

Dr. Cairn felt a mad exultation boiling up within him. He raised his hand, glanced once more at the face of the sleeper, and nerved himself to plunge the dagger into the heart of this evil being.

A second more, and the blade would have been buried to the hilt in the sleeper's breast, when there ensued a deafening, appalling explosion. A wild red light illuminated the room, and the building seemed to rock. Close upon that frightful sound followed a cry so piercing that it seemed to ice the blood in Dr. Cairn's veins:

"Stop sir, stop! My God, what are you doing?"

A swift blow struck the dagger from his hand, and the figure on the bed sprang upright. Swaying dizzily, Dr. Cairn stood there in the darkness. As the voice of awakened sleepers reached his ears from adjoining rooms, the electric light was switched on, and across the bed—the bed upon which he had thought that Antony Ferrara lay—he saw his son, Robert Cairn.

No one else was in the room; but on the carpet at his feet lay an ancient dagger, the hilt covered with beautiful and intricate gold and enamel work.

Rigid with a mutual horror, these two so strangely met stood staring at each other across the room. Every one in the hotel, it would appear, had been awakened by the explosion, which, as if by the intervention of God, had stayed the hand of Dr. Cairn—had spared him from a deed awful to contemplate.

There were sounds of running footsteps everywhere; but the origin of the disturbance, at that moment, had no interest for these two. Robert was the first to break the silence.

"Merciful God, sir!" he whispered huskily. "How did you come to be here? What is the matter? Are you ill?"

Dr. Cairn extended his hands like one groping in darkness.

"Rob, give me a moment to think, to collect myself. Why am I here? By all that is wonderful, why are you here?"

"I am here to meet you."

"To meet me! I had no idea that you were well enough for the journey. If you came to meet me, why—"

"That's it, sir! Why did you send me that wireless?"

"I sent no wireless, boy!"

Robert Cairn, with a little color returning to his pale cheeks, advanced and grasped his father's hand.

"After I arrived here to meet the steamer, sir, I received a wireless from the P. and O. boat due in the morning, to say that you had changed your mind, and were coming via Brindisi."

Dr. Cairn glanced at the dagger upon the carpet, repressed a shudder, and replied in a voice which he struggled to make firm:

"I did not send any wireless!"

"Then you actually came by the boat which arrived last night? To think that I was asleep in the same hotel! What an amazing—"

"Amazing indeed, Rob, and the result of a cunning scheme." He raised his eyes, looking fixedly at his son. "You understand the scheme—a scheme that could only have germinated in one mind—a scheme to cause me, your father, to—"

His voice failed, and again his glance sought the weapon which lay so close to his feet. Partly in order to hide his emotion, he stooped, picked up the dagger, and threw it on the bed.

"For God's sake, sir," groaned Robert, "what were you doing here in my room with—that?"

Dr. Cairn stood straight upright and replied in an even voice:

"I was here to do murder!"

"Murder?"

"I was under a spell—no need to name its weaver. I thought that a poisonous thing at last lay at my mercy, and by cunning means the primitive evil within me was called up. Braving the laws of God and man, I was about to slay that thing. Thank God!"

He dropped upon his knees, silently bowed his head for a moment, and then stood up, self-possessed again, as his son had always known him.

It had been a strange and awful awakening for Robert Cairn—to find his room illuminated by a lurid light, and to find his own father standing over him with a knife. But what had moved him still more deeply was the sight of the emotion which had shaken that stern and unemotional man. Now, as he gathered together his scattered wits, he began to perceive that a malignant hand was moving above them—that his father and himself were pawns, which had been moved mysteriously to a dreadful end.

IV

A GREAT disturbance had arisen in the streets below. Streams of people, it seemed, were pouring toward the harbor; but Dr. Cairn pointed to an armchair.

"Sit down, Rob," he said. "I will tell my story, and you shall tell yours. By comparing notes, we can arrive at some conclusion. Then we must act. This is a fight to a finish, and I begin to doubt if we are strong enough to win."

He took up the dagger and ran a critical glance over it, from the keen point to the enameled hilt.

"This is unique!" he muttered, whilst his son, spellbound, watched him. "The blade is as keen as if tempered but yesterday; yet it was made full five thousand years ago, as the workmanship of the hilt testifies. Rob, we deal with powers more than human! We have to cope with a force which might have awed the greatest masters whom the world has ever known. It would have called for all the knowledge and all the power of Apollonius of Tyana to have dealt with—him!"

"Antony Ferrara?"

"Undoubtedly, Rob! It was by the agency of Antony Ferrara that the wireless message was sent to you from the P. and O. boat. It was by the agency of Antony Ferrara that I dreamed a strange dream to-night. In fact, it was no true dream, for I was under the influence of—what shall I term it?—hypnotic suggestion. To what extent that malign will was responsible for you and me being placed in rooms communicating by means of a balcony, we probably shall never know; but if this proximity was merely accidental, the enemy did not fail to take advantage of the coincidence. I lay watching the stars before I slept, and one of them seemed to grow larger as I watched."

Dr. Cairn began to pace about the room in growing excitement.

"Rob, I cannot doubt that a mirror, or perhaps a crystal, was actually suspended before my eyes by some one who had been watching for the opportunity. I yielded myself to the soothing influence, and thus deliberately—deliberately—placed myself in the power of Antony Ferrara."

"You think that he is here, in this hotel?"

"I cannot doubt that he is in the neighborhood. The influence was too strong to have emanated from a mind at a great distance. I will tell you exactly what I dreamed."

He dropped into a cane armchair. Comparative quiet reigned again in the streets below, but a distant clamor told of some untoward happening at the harbor.

Dawn would break ere long, and there was a curious rawness in the atmosphere. Robert Cairn seated himself upon the side of the bed, and watched his father intently, while the latter related his strange nocturnal experience.

"You think, sir," said Robert, at the conclusion of his father's story, "that no part of your dream was real?"

Dr. Cairn held up the antique dagger, glancing at the speaker significantly.

"On the contrary," he replied, "I do know that part of it was dreadfully real. My difficulty is to separate the real from the phantasmal."

Silence fell for a moment.

"It is almost certain," said the younger man, frowning thoughtfully, "that you did not actually leave the hotel, but merely passed from your room to mine by way of the balcony."

Dr. Cairn stood up, walked to the open window, and looked out. Then he turned and faced his son again.

"I believe I can put that matter to the test," he declared. "In my dream, as I turned into the lane where the house was—the house of the mummy—there was a patch covered with deep mud, where at some time during the evening a quantity of water had been spilled. I stepped upon that patch, or dreamed that I did. We can settle the point."

He sat down on the bed beside his son, and, stooping, pulled off one of his slippers. The night had been full enough of dreadful surprises; but here was yet another, which came to them as Dr. Cairn,

with the inverted slipper in his hand, sat looking into his son's eyes.

The sole of the slipper was caked with reddish brown mud.

V

"We must find that house," said Dr. Cairn. "We must find the sarcophagus—for I no longer doubt that it exists—drag it out, and destroy it."

"Would you know it again, sir?"

"Beyond any possibility of doubt. It is the sarcophagus of a queen."

"What queen?"

"A queen whose tomb the late Sir Michael Ferrara and I sought for many months, but failed to find."

"Is she well known in Egyptian history?" asked Robert.

Dr. Cairn stared at his son with an odd expression in his eyes.

"Some histories ignore her existence entirely," he said. "I shall return to my room to dress now," he added, with an evident desire to change the subject. "Do you dress also. We cannot afford to sleep while the situation of that house remains unknown to us."

Robert Cairn nodded. His father stood up, and went out of the room.

Dawn saw the two of them peering from the balcony upon the streets of Port Said, already dotted with moving figures, for the Egyptian is an early riser.

"Have you any clew," asked the younger man, "to the direction in which this place lies?"

"Absolutely none, for the reason that I do not know where my dreaming left off, and reality commenced. Did some one really come to my window, and lead me out through another room downstairs, and into the street, or did I wander out of my own accord, and merely imagine the existence of the guide? In either event, I must have been guided in some way to a back entrance. Had I attempted to leave by the front door of the hotel in that trance-like condition, I should certainly have been detained by the porter. Suppose we commence, then, by inquiring if there is such another entrance?"

The hotel staff was already afoot, and their inquiries led to the discovery of an entrance communicating with the native servants' quarters. This could not be reached from the main hall, but to the left of the lift shaft there was a narrow stair-

case by which it might be gained. The two stood looking out across the stone-paved courtyard upon which the door opened.

"Beyond doubt," said Dr. Cairn, "I might have come down that staircase and out by this door without arousing a soul, either by passing through my own room, or through any other on that floor."

They crossed the yard, where members of the kitchen staff were busily polishing various cooking utensils, and opened the gate. Dr. Cairn turned to one of the men near by.

"Is this gate bolted at night?" he asked, in Arabic.

The man shook his head, and seemed to be much amused by the question, revealing his white teeth as he assured his questioner that it was not.

A narrow lane ran along behind the hotel, communicating with a maze of streets almost exclusively peopled by natives.

"Rob," said Dr. Cairn slowly, "it begins to dawn upon me that this is the way I came."

He stood looking to right and left, and seemed to be undecided.

"We will try turning to the right," he finally determined.

They set off along the narrow way. Once clear of the hotel wall, high buildings rose upon either side, so that at no time during the day could the sun have penetrated to the winding lane. Suddenly Robert Cairn stopped.

"Look!" he said, and pointed. "The mosque! You spoke of a mosque near to the house."

Dr. Cairn nodded. His eyes were gleaming, now that he felt himself to be upon the track of the evil power which had shattered his peace.

They advanced until they stood before the door of the mosque. There, in the shadow of a low archway, was just such an ancient, iron-studded door as Dr. Cairn remembered. Latticed windows overhung the street above, but no living creature was in sight.

He very gently pressed upon the door, but, as he had anticipated, it was fastened from within. In the vague light that penetrated the narrow street, his face seemed strangely haggard as he turned to his son, raising his eyebrows interrogatively.

"It is just possible that I may be mistaken," he said.

The doctor stood looking about him in some perplexity.

Adjoining the mosque was a ruinous house, which clearly had had no occupants for many years. As Robert Cairn's gaze lighted upon its gaping window frames and doorless porch, he seized his father by the arm.

"We might hide up there," he suggested, "and watch for any one entering or leaving the place opposite."

"I have little doubt that this was the scene of my experience," replied Dr. Cairn. "I think we will adopt your plan. Perhaps there is some means of egress at the back. It will be useful, if we have to remain on the watch for a long time."

They entered the ruined building, and, by means of a rickety staircase, gained the floor above. It moved beneath them unsafely, but from the divan which occupied one end of the apartment an uninterrupted view of the door below was obtainable.

"Stay here," said Dr. Cairn, "and watch, while I reconnoiter."

He descended the stairs again, to return in a minute or so and announce that another street could be reached through the back of the house. There and then they settled the plan of campaign. One at a time they would go to the hotel for their meals, so that the door would never be unwatched throughout the day. Dr. Cairn determined to make no inquiries respecting the house, as this might put the enemy upon his guard.

"We are in his own country, Rob," he said. "Here we can trust no one!"

VI

THEREUPON they commenced their singular and self-imposed task. In turn they went back to the hotel for breakfast, and watched fruitlessly throughout the morning. They lunched in the same way, and throughout the midday heat they sat hidden in the ruined building, mounting guard over that iron-studded door. It was a dreary and monotonous day, long to be remembered by both of them.

When the hour of sunset drew nigh, and their vigil remained unrewarded, they began to doubt the wisdom of their tactics. The street was but little frequented; there was not the slightest chance of their presence being discovered. It was very quiet, too, so that no one could have approached unheard.

At the hotel they had learned the cause of the explosion during the night—an accident in the engine room of a tramp steamer, which had done a great deal of damage, but caused no bodily injury.

"We may hope to win yet," said Dr. Cairn, in speaking of the incident. "It was the hand of God!"

Silence had prevailed between them for a long time, and he was about to propose that his son should go back to dinner, when the sound of a footstep below checked the words upon his lips. Both craned their necks to obtain a view of the pedestrian.

An old man, stooping beneath the burden of years, and resting much of his weight upon a staff, came tottering into sight. The watchers crouched back, breathless with excitement, as the newcomer paused before the iron-studded door, and from beneath his cloak took out a big key. Inserting it into the lock, he opened the door, which creaked upon ancient hinges as it swung inward, revealing a glimpse of a stone floor.

As the old man entered, Dr. Cairn grasped his son by the wrist.

"Down!" he whispered. "Now is our chance!"

They ran down the rickety stairs and crossed the narrow street, and Robert Cairn cautiously looked in around the door which had been left ajar.

The old man's stooping figure showed black against the dim light of another door at the farther end of the large and barn-like apartment. Tap, tap, tap, went the stick, and the aged Egyptian disappeared around a corner.

"Where can we hide?" whispered Dr. Cairn. "He is evidently making a tour of inspection."

The sound of footsteps mounting to the upper apartments came to their ears. They looked about them right and left, and presently the younger man detected a large wooden cupboard set in one wall. Opening it, he saw that it contained but one shelf only, near the top.

"When he returns," he said, "we can hide in here until he has gone out."

Dr. Cairn nodded. He was peering about the room intently.

"This is the place I came to, Rob," he said softly; "but there was a stone stair leading down to some room underneath. We must find that."

The old man could be heard passing from

room to room above. Then his uneven footsteps sounded on the stair again. Glancing at each other, the two stepped into the cupboard and pulled the door gently inward. A few moments later the old caretaker—such appeared to be his office—passed out, slamming the door behind him.

At that they emerged from their hiding-place and began to examine the apartment carefully. It was growing very dark. Indeed, with the door shut, it was difficult to detect the outlines of the room.

Suddenly a loud cry broke the perfect stillness, seeming to come from somewhere above. Robert Cairn started violently, grasping his father's arm, but the older man smiled.

"You forget that there is a mosque almost opposite," he said. "That is the muezzin."

His son laughed.

"My nerves are not yet all that they might be," he explained.

Bending low, he began to examine the pavement.

"There must be a trapdoor in the floor," he continued. "Don't you think so?"

His father nodded silently, and upon hands and knees also began to inspect the cracks and crannies between the various stones. In the right-hand corner farthest from the entrance, their quest was rewarded. A stone some three feet square moved slightly when pressure was applied to it, and gave a sound of hollowness beneath the tread.

Dust and litter covered the entire floor, but when the top of this particular stone was cleared, a ring was discovered, lying flat in a circular groove cut to receive it. The blade of a penknife served to raise it from its resting place, and Dr. Cairn, standing astride across the trap, tugged at the ring, and, without great difficulty, raised the stone block from its place.

A square hole was revealed. There were irregular stone steps leading down into the blackness. A piece of candle, stuck in a crude wooden holder, lay upon the topmost. Dr. Cairn, taking a box of matches from his pocket, quickly lighted the candle, and, holding it in his left hand, began to descend. His head was not yet below the level of the upper apartment when he paused.

"You have your revolver?" he said.

Robert nodded grimly, and took the weapon from his pocket.

A singular and most disagreeable smell was arising from the trap which they had opened. Ignoring this, they descended, and presently stood side by side in a low cellar. Here the odor was almost insupportable. It had in it something menacing, something definitely repellent. At the foot of the steps they stood hesitating.

Dr. Cairn slowly moved the candle, throwing the light along the floor, where it picked out strips of wood and broken cases, straw packing and kindred litter—until it impinged upon a brightly painted slab. Farther he moved it, and higher, and the end of a sarcophagus came into view. He drew a quick, hissing breath, and, bending forward, directed the light into the interior of the ancient coffin. Then he had need of all his iron nerve to choke down the cry that rose to his lips.

"Look! Look!" whispered his son.

Swathed in white wrappings, Antony Ferrara lay motionless before them.

The seconds passed one by one, until a whole minute was told, and still the two remained inert and the cold light shone full upon that ivory face.

"Is he dead?"

Robert Cairn spoke huskily, grasping his father's shoulders.

"I think not," was the equally hoarse reply. "He is in the state of trance mentioned in—certain ancient writings. He is absorbing evil force from the sarcophagus of the witch queen."*

There was a faint rustling sound in the cellar, which seemed to grow louder and more insistent; but Dr. Cairn, apparently, did not notice it, for he turned to his son, and, though the latter could see him but vaguely, he knew that his face was grimly set.

"It seems like butchery," he said evenly, "but, in the interests of the world, we must not hesitate. A shot might attract attention. Give me your knife!"

For a moment, the other scarcely comprehended the full purport of the words. Mechanically he took out his knife, and opened the big blade.

"Good Heavens, sir," he gasped breathlessly, "it is too awful!"

* It seems exceedingly probable that the mummy case (sarcophagus), with its painted presentment of the living person, was the material basis for the preservation of the Khu (magical powers) of a fully equipped adept.—*Collectanea Hermetica*, Vol. VIII.

"Awful, I grant you," replied Dr. Cairn, "but a duty—a duty, boy, and one that we must not shirk. I, alone among living men, know who and what lies there, and my conscience directs me in what I do. His end shall be that which he had planned for you. Give me the knife!"

He took the knife from his son's hand. With the light directed upon the still, ivory face, he stepped toward the sarcophagus.

As he did so, something dropped from the roof, narrowly missed striking his outstretched hand, and with a soft, dull thud fell upon the mud brick floor. Impelled by some intuition, he suddenly directed the light to the roof above.

Then, with a shrill cry which he was wholly unable to repress, Robert Cairn seized his father's arm and began to pull him back toward the stair.

"Quick, sir!" the young man screamed shrilly, almost hysterically. "My God! Be quick!"

The appearance of the roof above had puzzled him for an instant, as the light touched it, and then had filled his very soul with loathing and horror. Directly above them was moving a black patch, a foot or so in extent, and it was composed of a dense, writhing mass of tarantula spiders. A line of the disgusting creatures was mounting the wall and crossing the ceiling, ever swelling the unclean group.

Dr. Cairn did not hesitate to turn and run for the stair, and as he did so the spiders began to drop. Indeed, they seemed to leap toward the intruders, until the floor all about them, and the bottom steps of the stair, presented a mass of black, moving insects.

A perfect panic fear seized upon them. At every step spiders crunched beneath their feet. The poisonous insects seemed to come from nowhere, to be conjured up out of the darkness, until the whole cellar, the stairs, the very fetid air about them, became black and nauseous.

Halfway to the top Dr. Cairn turned, snatched out a revolver, and began firing down into the cellar in the direction of the sarcophagus.

A hairy, clutching thing ran up his arm, and his son, uttering a groan of horror, struck at it and stained the tweed with its poisonous blood.

They staggered to the head of the steps, and there Dr. Cairn turned and hurled the

candle at a monstrous spider that suddenly sprang into view. The candle, still attached to its wooden socket, went bounding down steps that now were literally carpeted with insects.

Tarantulas began to run out from the trap, as if pursuing the intruders, and a faint light showed from below. Then came a crackling sound, and a wisp of smoke floated up.

Dr. Cairn threw open the outer door, and the two panic-stricken men leaped out into the street and away from the spider army. White to the lips, they stood leaning against the wall.

"Was it really—Ferrara?" whispered Robert.

"I hope so!" was the answer.

Dr. Cairn pointed to the closed door. A rapidly spreading fan of smoke was creeping from beneath it.

VII

THE fire which ensued destroyed not only the house in which it had broken out, but the two adjoining; and the neighboring mosque was saved only with the utmost difficulty.

When, in the dawn of the new day, Dr. Cairn looked down into the smoking pit which once had been the home of the spiders, he shook his head and turned to his son.

"If our eyes did not deceive us, Rob," he said, "a just retribution has claimed him at last!"

Pressing a way through the surrounding crowd of natives, they returned to the hotel. The hall porter stopped them as they entered.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but which is Mr. Robert Cairn?"

Robert Cairn stepped forward.

"A young gentleman left this package here for you, sir, about half an hour ago," said the man. "He was a very pale gentleman, sir, with black eyes. He said you had dropped it."

Robert Cairn unwrapped the little parcel. It contained a penknife, the ivory handle charred as if it had been in a furnace. It was his own—which he had handed to his father in that awful cellar at the moment when the first spider had dropped. With it was inclosed a card bearing the penciled words:

With Antony Ferrara's compliments.

(This series will be continued in the October number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

Spell of the Desert

A ROMANCE OF THE SUN-BATHED LAND OF WIDE DISTANCES
AND FLAMING COLORS

By Raymond S. Spears

A MASS of gray, bare rock loomed ahead of Henry Howard, as he shaded his eyes to search a forbidding, creviced slope. Between the Hill Bottoms, who gathered from the neighborhood of One Hundred and Third Street along Lexington Avenue, and the Murphins, on the eminence of One Hundred and Second Street, up the Lexington Avenue hill, was war. In those days the gangs fought for those rocks, and this was in the campaign of 1889.

Howard was neat and natty, straight-backed, sharp-faced, and so slender that the gangsters called him Skimp. His watchfulness was neither pretense nor purposeless. He was a shining mark in his white waist, his flowing blue tie, his shapely knickerbockers, his jaunty cap, his undarned, holeless stockings, and his polished shoes. If Kip Murphin, leader of his rivals, had suspected the truth, there would have been double reason for Skimp Howard's extreme caution.

A girl awaited him just over the brim of the rocks, in a depression that would hide them from their respective clans. For only a moment he was silhouetted against the sky line, and then he greeted her eagerly:

"Hello, May!"

"Hello, Henry!" she returned.

May Murphin was a girl who was almost a boy—angular, exceedingly thin, tousle-haired, and much freckled. Henry sat awkwardly in the contentment of her attention.

"They'd pound you all up if they found us here," she suggested.

"I'd rather catch that than be afraid to come!" he replied, in frank admission. "You know I like you a lot."

"You must!" She smiled, and shivered deliciously.

For more than two years the two had been meeting on that dangerous peak, sometimes in the evening, sometimes in rain or snow, and often in broad day. They would find each other under the stone railway arch on Fourth Avenue, and even in Central Park, beyond Fifth Avenue.

Their boldness covered their clandestine rendezvous. Kip Murphin angrily refused even to suspect his sister of her double allegiance. Skimp fought down the rumor of his misalliancing, proving with his cutting knuckles that the truth was an utter lie. His victories were due more to his wrath than to strength.

Henry Howard gave May Murphin marshmallows bought with the profits of selling the evening papers. Demurely she accepted his homage. In an ecstasy of boldness, he pleaded for a kiss, but she sternly resented his timid suggestion. She puckered her bright red lips with utter scorn, which radiated from the crinkle of her nostrils through her freckles to her ears.

"I didn't mean nothing!" he gasped in alarm, adding, with hopeless insistence: "Just a little mite of one!"

Suddenly she relaxed from her tense denial. With a quick, unexpected presentation she allowed him the bold, sweet token of her condescending esteem. For a time he sat staring at her, awed, astonished, happy beyond words. Oddly wise, watchful and cautious, she fixed Skimp with the poniards of her eyes, warning him of her rising temper. However grateful, he remained humble.

One day Kip Murphin heard that Skimp Howard had been seen going alone toward Central Park. With four others, Kip trailed him, and was struck dumb to find the Hill Bottom youth feeding May chocolate drops. Then, while two held the with-