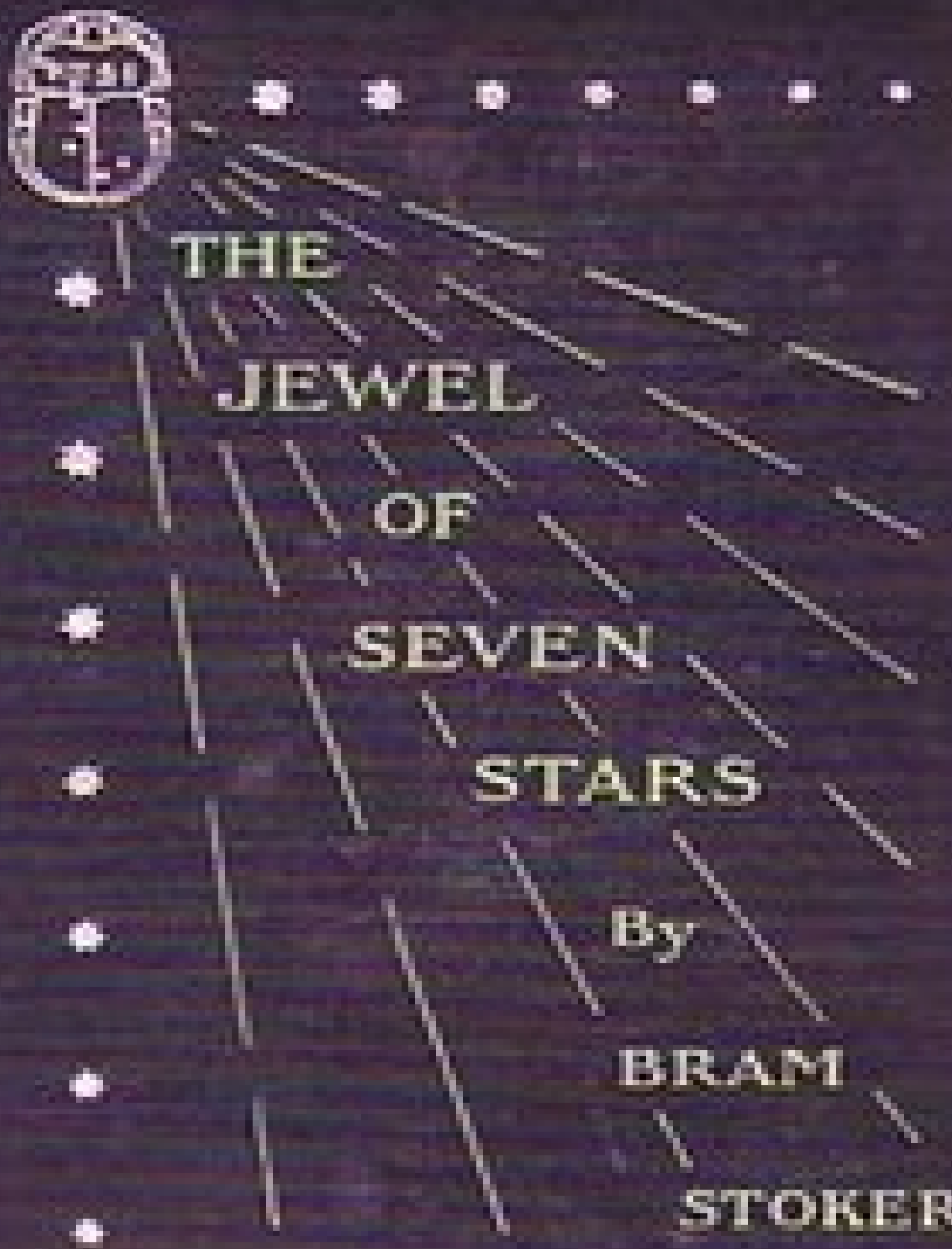
THE
JEWEL
OF
SEVEN
STARS
By
BRAM
STOKER

The Jewel of Seven Stars

by Bram Stoker

To Eleanor and Constance Hoyt

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Chapter I

A Summons in the Night

It all seemed so real that I could hardly imagine that it had ever occurred before; and yet each episode came, not as a fresh step in the logic of things, but as something expected. It is in such a wise that memory plays its pranks for good or ill; for pleasure or pain; for weal or woe. It is thus that life is bittersweet, and that which has been done becomes eternal.

Again, the light skiff, ceasing to shoot through the lazy water as when the oars flashed and dripped, glided out of the fierce July sunlight into the cool shade of the great drooping willow branches—I standing up in the swaying boat, she sitting still and with deft fingers guarding herself from stray twigs or the freedom of the resilience of moving boughs. Again, the water looked golden-brown under the canopy of translucent green; and the grassy bank was of emerald hue. Again, we

sat in the cool shade, with the myriad noises of nature both without and

within our bower merging into that drowsy hum in whose sufficing

environment the great world with its disturbing trouble, and its more

disturbing joys, can be effectually forgotten. Again, in that blissful

solitude the young girl lost the convention of her prim, narrow

upbringing, and told me in a natural, dreamy way of the loneliness of

her new life. With an undertone of sadness she made m e feel how in that

spacious home each one of the household was isolated by the personal

magnificence of her father and herself; that there confidence had no

altar, and sympathy no shrine; and that there even her father's face was

as distant as the old country life seemed now. Once more, the wisdom of

my manhood and the experience of my years laid themselves at the girl's

feet. It was seemingly their own doing; for the individual "I" had no

say in the matter, but only just obeyed imperative orders. And once

again the flying seconds multiplied themselves endlessly. For it is in

the arcana of dreams that existences merge and renew themselves, change

and yet keep the same—like the soul of a musician in a fugue. And so

memory swooned, again and again, in sleep.

It seems that there is never to be any perfect rest. Even in Eden the

snake rears its head among the laden boughs of the Tree of Knowledge.

The silence of the dreamless night is broken by the roar of the

avalanche; the hissing of sudden floods; the clanging of the engine bell

marking its sweep through a sleeping American town; the clanking of

distant paddles over the sea…. Whatever it is, it is breaking the

charm of my Eden. The canopy of greenery above us, starred with

diamond-points of light, seems to quiver in the ceaseless beat of

paddles; and the restless bell seems as though it would never cease….

All at once the gates of Sleep were thrown wide open, and my waking ears

took in the cause of the disturbing sounds. Waking existence is prosaic

enough—there was somebody knocking and ringing at someone's street door.

I was pretty well accustomed in my Jermyn Street chambers to passing

sounds; usually I did not concern myself, sleeping or waking, with the

doings, however noisy, of my neighbours. But this noise was too

continuous, too insistent, too imperative to be ignored. There was some

active intelligence behind that ceaseless sound; and some stress or need

behind the intelligence. I was not altogether selfish, and at the

thought of someone's need I was, without premeditation, out of bed.

Instinctively I looked at my watch. It was just three o'clock; there

was a faint edging of grey round the green blind which darkened my room.

It was evident that the knocking and ringing were at the door of our own

house; and it was evident, too, that there was no one awake to answer

the call. I slipped on my dressing-gown and slippers, and went down to

the hall door. When I opened it there stood a dapper groom, with one

hand pressed unflinchingly on the electric bell whilst with the other he

raised a ceaseless clangour with the knocker. The instant he saw me the

noise ceased; one hand went up instinctively to the brim of his hat, and

the other produced a letter from his pocket. A neat brougham was

opposite the door, the horses were breathing heavily as though they had

come fast. A policeman, with his night lantern still alight at his

belt, stood by, attracted to the spot by the noise.

"Beg pardon, sir, I'm sorry for disturbing you, but my orders was

imperative; I was not to lose a moment, but to knock and ring till

someone came. May I ask you, sir, if Mr. Malcolm Ross lives here?"

"I am Mr. Malcolm Ross."

“Then this letter is for you, sir, and the bro’am is for you too, sir!”

I took, with a strange curiosity, the letter which he handed to me. As a barrister I had had, of course, odd experiences now and then, including sudden demands upon my time; but never anything like this. I stepped back into the hall, closing the door to, but leaving it ajar; then I switched on the electric light. The letter was directed in a strange hand, a woman’s. It began at once without “dear sir” or any such address:

“You said you would like to help me if I needed it; and I believe you meant what you said. The time has come sooner than I expected. I am in dreadful trouble, and do not know where to turn, or to whom to apply. An attempt has, I fear, been made to murder my Father; though, thank God, he still lives. But he is quite unconscious. The doctors and police have been sent for; but there is no one here whom I can depend on. Come at once if you are able to; and forgive me if you can. I suppose I

shall realise later what I have done in asking such a favour; but at

present I cannot think. Come! Come at once! MARGARET TRELAWNY."

Pain and exultation struggled in my mind as I read; but the mastering

thought was that she was in trouble and had called on me—me! My

dreaming of her, then, was not altogether without a cause. I called out

to the groom:

"Wait! I shall be with you in a minute!" Then I flew upstairs.

A very few minutes sufficed to wash and dress; and we were soon driving

through the streets as fast as the horses could go. It was market

morning, and when we got out on Picadilly there was an endless stream of

carts coming from the west; but for the rest the roadway was clear, and

we went quickly. I had told the groom to come into the brougham with me

so that he could tell me what had happened as we went along. He sat

awkwardly, with his hat on his knees as he spoke.

"Miss Trelawny, sir, sent a man to tell us to get out a carriage at

once; and when we was ready she come herself and gave me the letter and

told Morgan—the coachman, sir—to fly. She said as I was to lose not a

second, but to keep knocking till someone come."

"Yes, I know, I know—you told me! What I want to know is, why she sent

for me. What happened in the house?"

"I don't quite know myself, sir; except that master was found in his

room senseless, with the sheets all bloody, and a wound on his head. He

couldn't be waked nohow. "Twas Miss Trelawny herself as found him."

"How did she come to find him at such an hour? It was late in the

night, I suppose?”

“I don’t know, sir; I didn’t hear nothing at all of the details.”

As he could tell me no more, I stopped the carriage for a moment to let

him get out on the box; then I turned the matter over in my mind as I

sat alone. There were many things which I could have asked the servant;

and for a few moments after he had gone I was angry with myself for not

having used my opportunity. On second thought, however, I was glad the

temptation was gone. I felt that it would be more delicate to learn

what I wanted to know of Miss Trelawny’s surroundings from herself,

rather than from her servants.

We bowled swiftly along Knightsbridge, the small noise of our well-appointed vehicle sounding hollowly in the morning air. We turned up

the Kensington Palace Road and presently stopped opposite a great house

on the left-hand side, nearer, so far as I could judge, the Notting Hill than the Kensington end of the avenue. It was a truly fine house, not only with regard to size but to architecture. Even in the dim grey light of the morning, which tends to diminish the size of things, it looked big.

Miss Trelawny met me in the hall. She was not in any way shy. She seemed to rule all around her with a sort of high-bred dominance, all the more remarkable as she was greatly agitated and as pale as snow. In the great hall were several servants, the men standing together near the hall door, and the women clinging together in the further corners and doorways. A police superintendent had been talking to Miss Trelawny; two men in uniform and one plain-clothes man stood near him. As she took my hand impulsively there was a look of relief in her eyes, and she gave a gentle sigh of relief. Her salutation was simple.

“I knew you would come!”

The clasp of the hand can mean a great deal, even when it is not

intended to mean anything especially. Miss Trelawny’s hand somehow

became lost in my own. It was not that it was a small hand; it was fine

and flexible, with long delicate fingers—a rare and beautiful hand; it

was the unconscious self-surrender. And though at the moment I could

not dwell on the cause of the thrill which swept me, it came back to me

later.

She turned and said to the police superintendent:

“This is Mr. Malcolm Ross.” The police officer saluted as he answered:

“I know Mr. Malcolm Ross, miss. Perhaps he will rem ember I had the

honour of working with him in the Brixton Coining case.” I had not at

first glance noticed who it was, my whole attention having been taken

with Miss Trelawny.

"Of course, Superintendent Dolan, I remember very well!" I said as we

shook hands. I could not but note that the acquaintanceship seemed a

relief to Miss Trelawny. There was a certain vague uneasiness in her

manner which took my attention; instinctively I felt that it would be

less embarrassing for her to speak with me alone. So I said to the

Superintendent:

"Perhaps it will be better if Miss Trelawny will see me alone for a few

minutes. You, of course, have already heard all she knows; and I shall

understand better how things are if I may ask some questions. I will

then talk the matter over with you if I may."

"I shall be glad to be of what service I can, sir," he answered

heartily.

Following Miss Trelawny, I moved over to a dainty room which opened from

the hall and looked out on the garden at the back of the house. When we

had entered and I had closed the door she said:

"I will thank you later for your goodness in coming to me in my trouble;

but at present you can best help me when you know the facts."

"Go on," I said. "Tell me all you know and spare no detail, however

trivial it may at the present time seem to be." She went on at once:

"I was awakened by some sound; I do not know what. I only know that it

came through my sleep; for all at once I found myself awake, with my

heart beating wildly, listening anxiously for some sound from my

Father's room. My room is next Father's, and I can often hear him

moving about before I fall asleep. He works late at night, sometimes

very late indeed; so that when I wake early, as I do occasionally, or in

the grey of the dawn, I hear him still moving. I tried once to

remonstrate with him about staying up so late, as it cannot be good for

him; but I never ventured to repeat the experiment. You know how stern

and cold he can be—at least you may remember what I told you about him;

and when he is polite in this mood he is dreadful. When he is angry I

can bear it much better; but when he is slow and deliberate, and the

side of his mouth lifts up to show the sharp teeth, I think I feel—well,

I don't know how! Last night I got up softly and stole to the door, for

I really feared to disturb him. There was not any noise of moving, and

no kind of cry at all; but there was a queer kind of dragging sound, and

a slow, heavy breathing. Oh! it was dreadful, waiting there in the dark

and the silence, and fearing—fearing I did not know what!

"At last I took my courage a deux mains, and turning the handle as

softly as I could, I opened the door a tiny bit. It was quite dark within; I could just see the outline of the windows. But in the darkness the sound of breathing, becoming more distinct, was appalling.

As I listened, this continued; but there was no other sound. I pushed the door open all at once. I was afraid to open it slowly; I felt as if there might be some dreadful thing behind it ready to pounce out on me!

Then I switched on the electric light, and stepped into the room. I looked first at the bed. The sheets were all crumpled up, so that I knew Father had been in bed; but there was a great dark red patch in the centre of the bed, and spreading to the edge of it, that made my heart stand still. As I was gazing at it the sound of the breathing came across the room, and my eyes followed to it. There was Father on his right side with the other arm under him, just as if his dead body had been thrown there all in a heap. The track of blood went across the room up to the bed, and there was a pool all around him which looked terribly red and glittering as I bent over to examine him. The place

where he lay was right in front of the big safe. He was in his pyjamas.

The left sleeve was torn, showing his bare arm, and stretched out toward

the safe. It looked—oh! so terrible, patched all with blood, and with

the flesh torn or cut all around a gold chain bangle on his wrist. I

did not know he wore such a thing, and it seemed to give me a new shock

of surprise."

She paused a moment; and as I wished to relieve her by a moment's

divergence of thought, I said:

"Oh, that need not surprise you. You will see the most unlikely men

wearing bangles. I have seen a judge condemn a man to death, and the

wrist of the hand he held up had a gold bangle." She did not seem to

heed much the words or the idea; the pause, however, relieved her

somewhat, and she went on in a steadier voice:

"I did not lose a moment in summoning aid, for I feared he might bleed

to death. I rang the bell, and then went out and called for help as

loudly as I could. In what must have been a very short time—though it

seemed an incredibly long one to me—some of the servants came running

up; and then others, till the room seemed full of staring eyes, and

dishevelled hair, and night clothes of all sorts.

"We lifted Father on a sofa; and the housekeeper, Mrs. Grant, who seemed

to have her wits about her more than any of us, began to look where the

flow of blood came from. In a few seconds it became apparent that it

came from the arm which was bare. There was a deep wound—not clean-cut

as with a knife, but like a jagged rent or tear—close to the wrist,

which seemed to have cut into the vein. Mrs. Grant tied a handkerchief

round the cut, and screwed it up tight with a silver paper-cutter; and

the flow of blood seemed to be checked at once. By this time I had come

to my senses—or such of them as remained; and I sent off one man for the

doctor and another for the police. When they had gone, I felt that,

except for the servants, I was all alone in the house, and that I knew

nothing—of my Father or anything else; and a great longing came to me to

have someone with me who could help me. Then I thought of you and your

kind offer in the boat under the willow-tree; and, without waiting to

think, I told the men to get a carriage ready at once, and I scribbled a

note and sent it on to you."

She paused. I did not like to say just then anything of how I felt. I

looked at her; I think she understood, for her eyes were raised to mine

for a moment and then fell, leaving her cheeks as red as peony roses.

With a manifest effort she went on with her story:

"The Doctor was with us in an incredibly short time. The groom had met

him letting himself into his house with his latchkey, and he came here

running. He made a proper tourniquet for poor Father's arm, and then

went home to get some appliances. I dare say he will be back almost

immediately. Then a policeman came, and sent a message to the station;

and very soon the Superintendent was here. Then you came."

There was a long pause, and I ventured to take her hand for an instant.

Without a word more we opened the door, and joined the Superintendent in

the hall. He hurried up to us, saying as he came:

"I have been examining everything myself, and have sent off a message to

Scotland Yard. You see, Mr. Ross, there seemed so much that was odd

about the case that I thought we had better have the best man of the

Criminal Investigation Department that we could get. So I sent a note

asking to have Sergeant Daw sent at once. You remember him, sir, in

that American poisoning case at Hoxton."

"Oh yes," I said, "I remember him well; in that and other cases, for I have benefited several times by his skill and acumen. He has a mind that works as truly as any that I know. When I have been for the defence, and believed my man was innocent, I was glad to have him against us!"

"That is high praise, sir!" said the Superintendent gratified: "I am glad you approve of my choice; that I did well in sending for him."

I answered heartily:

"Could not be better. I do not doubt that between you we shall get at

the facts—and what lies behind them!"

We ascended to Mr. Trelawny's room, where we found everything exactly as

his daughter had described.

There came a ring at the house bell, and a minute later a man was shown

into the room. A young man with aquiline features, keen grey eyes, and

a forehead that stood out square and broad as that of a thinker. In his

hand he had a black bag which he at once opened. Miss Trelawny

introduced us: “Doctor Winchester, Mr. Ross, Superintendent Dolan.” We

bowed mutually, and he, without a moment’s delay, began his work. We

all waited, and eagerly watched him as he proceeded to dress the wound.

As he went on he turned now and again to call the Superintendent’s

attention to some point about the wound, the latter proceeding to enter

the fact at once in his notebook.

“See! several parallel cuts or scratches beginning on the left side of

the wrist and in some places endangering the radial artery.

“These small wounds here, deep and jagged, seem as if made with a blunt

instrument. This in particular would seem as if made with some kind of

sharp wedge; the flesh round it seems torn as if with lateral pressure.”

Turning to Miss Trelawny he said presently:

“Do you think we might remove this bangle? It is not absolutely

necessary, as it will fall lower on the wrist where it can hang loosely;

but it might add to the patient’s comfort later on.” The poor girl

flushed deeply as she answered in a low voice:

“I do not know. I—I have only recently come to live with my Father; and

I know so little of his life or his ideas that I fear i can hardly judge

in such a matter. The Doctor, after a keen glance at her, said in a

very kindly way:

“Forgive me! I did not know. But in any case you need not be

distressed. It is not required at present to move it. Were it so I

should do so at once on my own responsibility. If it be necessary later

on, we can easily remove it with a file. Your Father doubtless has some

object in keeping it as it is. See! there is a tiny key attached to it.

…" As he was speaking he stopped and bent lower, taking from my

hand the candle which I held and lowering it till its light fell on the

bangle. Then motioning me to hold the candle in the same position, he

took from his pocket a magnifying-glass which he adjusted. When he had

made a careful examination he stood up and handed the magnifying-glass

to Dolan, saying as he did so:

"You had better examine it yourself. That is no ordinary bangle. The

gold is wrought over triple steel links; see where it is worn away. It

is manifestly not meant to be removed lightly; and it would need more

than an ordinary file to do it."

The Superintendent bent his great body; but not getting close enough

that way knelt down by the sofa as the Doctor had done. He examined the

bangle minutely, turning it slowly round so that no particle of it

escaped observation. Then he stood up and handed the magnifying-glass to

me. "When you have examined it yourself," he said, "let the lady look

at it if she will," and she commenced to write at length in his

notebook.

I made a simple alteration in his suggestion. I held out the glass

toward Miss Trelawny, saying:

"Had you not better examine it first?" She drew back, slightly raising

her hand in disclaimer, as she said impulsively:

"Oh no! Father would doubtless have shown it to me had he wished me to

see it. I would not like to without his consent." Then she added,

doubtless fearing lest her delicacy of view should give offence to the

rest of us:

"Of course it is right that you should see it. You have to examine and consider everything; and indeed—indeed I am grateful to you…"

She turned away; I could see that she was crying quietly. It was evident to me that even in the midst of her trouble and anxiety there was a chagrin that she knew so little of her father; and that her ignorance had to be shown at such a time and amongst so many strangers.

That they were all men did not make the shame more easy to bear, though there was a certain relief in it. Trying to interpret her feelings I could not but think that she must have been glad that no woman's eyes—of understanding greater than man's—were upon her in that hour.

When I stood up from my examination, which verified to me that of the Doctor, the latter resumed his place beside the couch and went on with his ministrations. Superintendent Dolan said to me in a whisper:

“I think we are fortunate in our doctor!” I nodded, and was about to add

something in praise of his acumen, when there came a low tapping at the

door.

Chapter II Strange Instructions

Superintendent Dolan went quietly to the door; by a sort of natural

understanding he had taken possession of affairs in the room. The rest

of us waited. He opened the door a little way; and then with a gesture

of manifest relief threw it wide, and a young man stepped in. A young

man clean-shaven, tall and slight; with an eagle face and bright, quick

eyes that seemed to take in everything around him at a glance. As he

came in, the Superintendent held out his hand; the two men shook hands

warmly.

"I came at once, sir, the moment I got your message. I am glad I still

have your confidence."

"That you'll always have," said the Superintendent heartily. "I have

not forgotten our old Bow Street days, and I never shall!" Then,

without a word of preliminary, he began to tell everything he knew up to

the moment of the newcomer's entry. Sergeant Daw asked a few questions—a

very few—when it was necessary for his understanding of circumstances or

the relative positions of persons; but as a rule Dolan, who knew his

work thoroughly, forestalled every query, and explained all necessary

matters as he went on. Sergeant Daw threw occasionally swift glances

round him; now at one of us; now at the room or some part of it; now at

the wounded man lying senseless on the sofa.

When the Superintendent had finished, the Sergeant turned to me and

said:

"Perhaps you remember me, sir. I was with you in that Hoxton case."

"I remember you very well," I said as I held out my hand. The

Superintendent spoke again:

"You understand, Sergeant Daw, that you are put in full charge of this

case."

"Under you I hope, sir," he interrupted. The other shook his head and

smiled as he said:

"It seems to me that this is a case that will take all a man's time and his brains. I have other work to do; but I shall be more than interested, and if I can help in any possible way I shall be glad to do so!"

"All right, sir," said the other, accepting his responsibility with a sort of modified salute; straightway he began his investigation.

First he came over to the Doctor and, having learned his name and address, asked him to write a full report which he could use, and which

he could refer to headquarters if necessary. Doctor Winchester bowed

gravely as he promised. Then the Sergeant approached me and said sotto

voce:

"I like the look of your doctor. I think we can work together!"

Turning to Miss Trelawny he asked:

"Please let me know what you can of your Father; his ways of life, his

history—in fact of anything of whatsoever kind which interests him, or

in which he may be concerned." I was about to interrupt to tell him

what she had already said of her ignorance in all matters of her father

and his ways, but her warning hand was raised to me pointedly and she

spoke herself.

"Alas! I know little or nothing. Superintendent Dolan and Mr. Ross

know already all I can say."

“Well, ma’am, we must be content to do what we can,” said the officer

genially. “I’ll begin by making a minute examination. You say that you

were outside the door when you heard the noise?”

“I was in my room when I heard the queer sound—indeed it must have been

the early part of whatever it was which woke me. I came out of my room

at once. Father’s door was shut, and I could see the whole landing and

the upper slopes of the staircase. No one could have left by the door

unknown to me, if that is what you mean!”

“That is just what I do mean, miss. If every one who knows anything

will tell me as well as that, we shall soon get to the bottom of this.”

He then went over to the bed, looked at it carefully, and asked:

“Has the bed been touched?”

“Not to my knowledge,” said Miss Trelawny, “but I shall ask Mrs. Grant—

the housekeeper,” she added as she rang the bell. Mrs. Grant answered

it in person. “Come in,” said Miss Trelawny. “These gentlemen want to

know, Mrs. Grant, if the bed has been touched.”

“Not by me, ma’am.”

“Then,” said Miss Trelawny, turning to Sergeant Daw, “it cannot have

been touched by any one. Either Mrs. Grant or I myself was here all the

time, and I do not think any of the servants who came when I gave the

alarm were near the bed at all. You see, Father lay here just under the

great safe, and every one crowded round him. We sent them all away in a

very short time.” Daw, with a motion of his hand, asked us all to stay

at the other side of the room whilst with a magnifying-glass he examined

the bed, taking care as he moved each fold of the bedclothes to replace

it in exact position. Then he examined with his magnifying-glass the

floor beside it, taking especial pains where the blood had trickled over

the side of the bed, which was of heavy red wood handsomely carved.

Inch by inch, down on his knees, carefully avoiding any touch with the

stains on the floor, he followed the blood-marks over to the spot, close

under the great safe, where the body had lain. All around and about

this spot he went for a radius of some yards; but seemingly did not meet

with anything to arrest special attention. Then he examined the front

of the safe; round the lock, and along the bottom and top of the double

doors, more especially at the places of their touching in front.

Next he went to the windows, which were fastened down with the hasps.

“Were the shutters closed?” he asked Miss Trelawny in a casual way as

though he expected the negative answer, which came.

All this time Doctor Winchester was attending to his patient; now

dressing the wounds in the wrist or making minute examination all over

the head and throat, and over the heart. More than once he put his nose

to the mouth of the senseless man and sniffed. Each time he did so he

finished up by unconsciously looking round the room, as though in search

of something.

Then we heard the deep strong voice of the Detective:

“So far as I can see, the object was to bring that key to the lock of

the safe. There seems to be some secret in the mechanism that I am

unable to guess at, though I served a year in Chubb’s before I joined

the police. It is a combination lock of seven letters; but there seems

to be a way of locking even the combination. It is one of Chatwood's; I

shall call at their place and find out something about it." Then

turning to the Doctor, as though his own work were for the present done,

he said:

"Have you anything you can tell me at once, Doctor, which will not

interfere with your full report? If there is any doubt I can wait, but

the sooner I know something definite the better." Doctor Winchester

answered at once:

"For my own part I see no reason in waiting. I shall make a full report

of course. But in the meantime I shall tell you all I know—which is

after all not very much, and all I think—which is less definite. There

is no wound on the head which could account for the state of stupor in

which the patient continues. I must, therefore, take it that either he

has been drugged or is under some hypnotic influence. So far as I can

judge, he has not been drugged—at least by means of any drug of whose

qualities I am aware. Of course, there is ordinarily in this room so

much of a mummy smell that it is difficult to be certain about anything

having a delicate aroma. I dare say that you have noticed the peculiar

Egyptians scents, bitumen, nard, aromatic gums and spices, and so forth.

It is quite possible that somewhere in this room, amongst the curios and

hidden by stronger scents, is some substance or liquid which may have

the effect we see. It is possible that the patient has taken some drug,

and that he may in some sleeping phase have injured himself. I do not

think this is likely; and circumstances, other than those which I have

myself been investigating, may prove that this surmise is not correct.

But in the meantime it is possible; and must, till it be disproved, be

kept within our purview." Here Sergeant Daw interrupted:

"That may be, but if so, we should be able to find the instrument with

which the wrist was injured. There would be marks of blood somewhere."

"Exactly so!" said the Doctor, fixing his glasses as though preparing for an argument. "But if it be that the patient has used some strange drug, it may be one that does not take effect at once. As we are as yet ignorant of its potentialities—if, indeed, the whole surmise is correct at all—we must be prepared at all points."

Here Miss Trelawny joined in the conversation:

"That would be quite right, so far as the action of the drug was concerned; but according to the second part of your surmise the wound may have been self-inflicted, and this after the drug had taken effect."

"True!" said the Detective and the Doctor simultaneously. She went on:

“As however, Doctor, your guess does not exhaust the possibilities, we

must bear in mind that some other variant of the same root-idea may be

correct. I take it, therefore, that our first search, to be made on

this assumption, must be for the weapon with which the injury was done

to my Father’s wrist.”

“Perhaps he put the weapon in the safe before he became quite

unconscious,” said I, giving voice foolishly to a half-formed thought.

“That could not be,” said the Doctor quickly. “At least I think it

could hardly be,” he added cautiously, with a brief bow to me. “You

see, the left hand is covered with blood; but there is no blood mark

whatever on the safe.”

“Quite right!” I said, and there was a long pause.

The first to break the silence was the Doctor.

"We shall want a nurse here as soon as possible; and I know the very one

to suit. I shall go at once to get her if I can. I must ask that till

I return some of you will remain constantly with the patient. It may be

necessary to remove him to another room later on; but in the meantime he

is best left here. Miss Trelawny, may I take it that either you or Mrs.

Grant will remain her—not merely in the room, but close to the patient

and watchful of him—till I return?"

She bowed in reply, and took a seat beside the sofa. The Doctor gave

her some directions as to what she should do in case her father should

become conscious before his return.

The next to move was Superintendent Dolan, who came close to Sergeant

Daw as he said:

"I had better return now to the station—unless, of course, you should

wish me to remain for a while."

He answered, "Is Johnny Wright still in your division?"

"Yes! Would you like him to be with you?" The other nodded reply.

"Then I will send him on to you as soon as can be arranged. He shall

then stay with you as long as you wish. I will tell him that he is to

take his instructions entirely from you."

The Sergeant accompanied him to the door, saying as he went:

"Thank you, sir; you are always thoughtful for men who are working with

you. It is a pleasure to me to be with you again. I shall go back to

Scotland Yard and report to my chief. Then I shall call at Chatwood's;

and I shall return here as soon as possible. I suppose I may take it,

miss, that I may put up here for a day or two, if required. It may be

some help, or possibly some comfort to you, if I am about, until we

unravel this mystery."

"I shall be very grateful to you." He looked keenly at her for a few

seconds before he spoke again.

"Before I go have I permission to look about your Father's table and

desk? There might be something which would give us a clue—or a lead at

all events." Her answer was so unequivocal as almost to surprise him.

"You have the fullest possible permission to do anything which may help

us in this dreadful trouble—to discover what it is that is wrong with my

Father, or which may shield him in the future!"

He began at once a systematic search of the dressing-table, and after

that of the writing-table in the room. In one of the drawers he found a

letter sealed; this he brought at once across the room and handed to

Miss Trelawny.

"A letter—directed to me—and in my Father's hand!" she said as she eagerly opened it. I watched her face as she began to read; but seeing at once that Sergeant Daw kept his keen eyes on her face, unflinchingly watching every flitting expression, I kept my eyes henceforth fixed on his. When Miss Trelawny had read her letter through, I had in my mind a conviction, which, however, I kept locked in my own heart. Amongst the suspicions in the mind of the Detective was one, rather perhaps potential than definite, of Miss Trelawny herself.

For several minutes Miss Trelawny held the letter in her hand with her eyes downcast, thinking. Then she read it carefully again; this time the varying expressions were intensified, and I thought I could easily follow them. When she had finished the second reading, she paused again. Then, though with some reluctance, she handed the letter to the

Detective. He read it eagerly but with unchanging face; read it a

second time, and then handed it back with a bow. She paused a little

again, and then handed it to me. As she did so she raised her eyes to

mine for a single moment appealingly; a swift blush spread over her pale

cheeks and forehead.

With mingled feelings I took it, but, all said, I was glad. She did not

show any perturbation in giving the letter to the Detective—she might

not have shown any to anyone else. But to me…I feared to follow the

thought further; but read on, conscious that the eyes of both Miss

Trelawny and the Detective were fixed on me.

"MY DEAR DAUGHTER, I want you to take this letter as an instruction—

absolute and imperative, and admitting of no deviation whatever—in case

anything untoward or unexpected by you or by others should happen to me.

If I should be suddenly and mysteriously stricken down—either by sickness, accident or attack—you must follow these directions implicitly. If I am not already in my bedroom when you are made cognisant of my state, I am to be brought there as quickly as possible.

Even should I be dead, my body is to be brought there. Thenceforth, until I am either conscious and able to give instructions on my own account, or buried, I am never to be left alone—not for a single instant. From nightfall to sunrise at least two persons must remain in the room. It will be well that a trained nurse be in the room from time to time, and will note any symptoms, either permanent or changing, which may strike her. My solicitors, Marvin & Jewkes, of 27B Lincoln's Inn, have full instructions in case of my death; and Mr. Marvin has himself undertaken to see personally my wishes carried out. I should advise you, my dear Daughter, seeing that you have no relative to apply to, to get some friend whom you can trust to either remain within the house where instant communication can be made, or to come nightly to aid in

the watching, or to be within call. Such friend may be either male or female; but, whichever it may be, there should be added one other watcher or attendant at hand of the opposite sex. Understand, that it is of the very essence of my wish that there should be, awake and exercising themselves to my purposes, both masculine and feminine intelligences. Once more, my dear Margaret, let me impress on you the need for observation and just reasoning to conclusions, howsoever strange. If I am taken ill or injured, this will be no ordinary occasion; and I wish to warn you, so that your guarding may be complete.

"Nothing in my room—I speak of the curios—must be removed or displaced in any way, or for any cause whatever. I have a special reason and a special purpose in the placing of each; so that any moving of them would thwart my plans.

"Should you want money or counsel in anything, Mr. Marvin will carry out

your wishes; to the which he has my full instructions."

"ABEL TRELAWNY."

I read the letter a second time before speaking, for I feared to betray

myself. The choice of a friend might be a momentous occasion for me. I

had already ground for hope, that she had asked me to help her in the

first throe of her trouble; but love makes its own doubtings, and I

feared. My thoughts seemed to whirl with lightning rapidity, and in a

few seconds a whole process of reasoning became formulated. I must not

volunteer to be the friend that the father advised his daughter to have

to aid her in her vigil; and yet that one glance had a lesson which I

must not ignore. Also, did not she, when she wanted help, send to me—to

me a stranger, except for one meeting at a dance and one brief afternoon

of companionship on the river? Would it not humiliate her to make her

ask me twice? Humiliate her! No! that pain I could at all events save her; it is not humiliation to refuse. So, as I handed her back the letter, I said:

"I know you will forgive me, Miss Trelawny, if I presume too much; but if you will permit me to aid in the watching I shall be proud. Though the occasion is a sad one, I shall be so far happy to be allowed the privilege."

Despite her manifest and painful effort at self-control, the red tide swept her face and neck. Even her eyes seemed suffused, and in stern contrast with her pale cheeks when the tide had rolled back. She answered in a low voice:

"I shall be very grateful for your help!" Then in an afterthought she added:

"But you must not let me be selfish in my need! I know you have many

duties to engage you; and though I shall value your help highly—most

highly—it would not be fair to monopolise your time."

"As to that," I answered at once, "my time is yours. I can for today

easily arrange my work so that I can come here in the afternoon and stay

till morning. After that, if the occasion still demands it, I can so

arrange my work that I shall have more time still at my disposal."

She was much moved. I could see the tears gather in her eyes, and she

turned away her head. The Detective spoke:

"I am glad you will be here, Mr. Ross. I shall be in the house myself,

as Miss Trelawny will allow me, if my people in Scotland Yard will

permit. That letter seems to put a different complexion on everything;

though the mystery remains greater than ever. If you can wait here an

hour or two I shall go to headquarters, and then to the safe-makers.

After that I shall return; and you can go away easier in your mind, for

I shall be here."

When he had gone, we two, Miss Trelawny and I, remained in silence. At

last she raised her eyes and looked at me for a moment; after that I

would not have exchanged places with a king. For a while she busied

herself round the extemporised bedside of her father. Then, asking me

to be sure not to take my eyes off him till she returned, she hurried

out.

In a few minutes she came back with Mrs. Grant and two maids and a

couple of men, who bore the entire frame and furniture of a light iron

bed. This they proceeded to put together and to make. When the work

was completed, and the servants had withdrawn, she said to me:

"It will be well to be all ready when the Doctor returns. He will

surely want to have Father put to bed; and a proper bed will be better

for him than the sofa." She then got a chair close beside her father,

and sat down watching him.

I went about the room, taking accurate note of all i saw. And truly

there were enough things in the room to evoke the curiosity of any man—

even though the attendant circumstances were less strange. The whole

place, excepting those articles of furniture necessary to a

well-furnished bedroom, was filled with magnificent curios, chiefly

Egyptian. As the room was of immense size there was opportunity for the

placing of a large number of them, even if, as with these, they were of

huge proportions.

Whilst I was still investigating the room there came the sound of wheels

on the gravel outside the house. There was a ring at the hall door, and

a few minutes later, after a preliminary tap at the door and an

answering “Come in!” Doctor Winchester entered, followed by a young

woman in the dark dress of a nurse.

“I have been fortunate!” he said as he came in. “I found her at once

and free. Miss Trelawny, this is Nurse Kennedy!”

Chapter III

The Watchers

I was struck by the way the two young women looked at each other. I

suppose I have been so much in the habit of weighing up in my own mind

the personality of witnesses and of forming judgment by their

unconscious action and mode of bearing themselves, that the habit

extends to my life outside as well as within the court-house. At this

moment of my life anything that interested Miss Trelawny interested me;

and as she had been struck by the newcomer I instinctively weighed her

up also. By comparison of the two I seemed somehow to gain a new

knowledge of Miss Trelawny. Certainly, the two women made a good

contrast. Miss Trelawny was of fine figure; dark, straight-featured.

She had marvellous eyes; great, wide-open, and as black and soft as

velvet, with a mysterious depth. To look in them was like gazing at a

black mirror such as Doctor Dee used in his wizard rites. I heard an

old gentleman at the picnic, a great oriental traveller, describe the

effect of her eyes "as looking at night at the great distant lamps of a mosque through the open door." The eyebrows were typical. Finely arched and rich in long curling hair, they seemed like the proper architectural environment of the deep, splendid eyes. Her hair was black also, but was as fine as silk. Generally black hair is a type of animal strength and seems as if some strong expression of the forces of a strong nature; but in this case there could be no such thought. There were refinement and high breeding; and though there was no suggestion of weakness, any sense of power there was, was rather spiritual than animal. The whole harmony of her being seemed complete. Carriage, figure, hair, eyes; the mobile, full mouth, whose scarlet lips and white teeth seemed to light up the lower part of the face—as the eyes did the upper; the wide sweep of the jaw from chin to ear; the long, fine fingers; the hand which seemed to move from the wrist as though it had a sentience of its own. All these perfections went to make up a personality that dominated either by its grace, its sweetness, its

beauty, or its charm.

Nurse Kennedy, on the other hand, was rather under than over a woman's

average height. She was firm and thickset, with full limbs and broad,

strong, capable hands. Her colour was in the general effect that of an

autumn leaf. The yellow-brown hair was thick and long, and the

golden-brown eyes sparkled from the freckled, sunburnt skin. Her rosy

cheeks gave a general idea of rich brown. The red lips and white teeth

did not alter the colour scheme, but only emphasized it. She had a snub

nose—there was no possible doubt about it; but like such noses in

general it showed a nature generous, untiring, and full of good-nature.

Her broad white forehead, which even the freckles had spared, was full

of forceful thought and reason.

Doctor Winchester had on their journey from the hospital, coached her in

the necessary particulars, and without a word she took charge of the

patient and set to work. Having examined the new-made bed and shaken

the pillows, she spoke to the Doctor, who gave instructions; presently

we all four, stepping together, lifted the unconscious man from the

sofa.

Early in the afternoon, when Sergeant Daw had returned, I called at my

rooms in Jermyn Street, and sent out such clothes, books and papers as I

should be likely to want within a few days. Then I went on to keep my

legal engagements.

The Court sat late that day as an important case was ending; it was

striking six as I drove in at the gate of the Kensington Palace Road. I

found myself installed in a large room close to the sick chamber.

That night we were not yet regularly organised for watching, so that the

early part of the evening showed an unevenly balanced guard. Nurse

Kennedy, who had been on duty all day, was lying down, as she had

arranged to come on again by twelve o'clock. Doctor Winchester, who was

dining in the house, remained in the room until dinner was announced;

and went back at once when it was over. During dinner Mrs. Grant

remained in the room, and with her Sergeant Daw, who wished to complete

a minute examination which he had undertaken of everything in the room

and near it. At nine o'clock Miss Trelawny and I went in to relieve the

Doctor. She had lain down for a few hours in the afternoon so as to be

refreshed for her work at night. She told me that she had determined

that for this night at least she would sit up and watch. I did not try

to dissuade her, for I knew that her mind was made up. Then and there I

made up my mind that I would watch with her—unless, of course, I should

see that she really did not wish it. I said nothing of my intentions

for the present. We came in on tiptoe, so silently that the Doctor, who

was bending over the bed, did not hear us, and seemed a little startled

when suddenly looking up he saw our eyes upon him. I felt that the

mystery of the whole thing was getting on his nerves, as it had already

got on the nerves of some others of us. He was, I fancied, a little

annoyed with himself for having been so startled, and at once began to

talk in a hurried manner as though to get over our idea of his

embarrassment:

"I am really and absolutely at my wits" end to find any fit cause for

this stupor. I have made again as accurate an examination as I know

how, and I am satisfied that there is no injury to the brain, that is,

no external injury. Indeed, all his vital organs seem unimpaired. I

have given him, as you know, food several times and it has manifestly

done him good. His breathing is strong and regular, and his pulse is

slower and stronger than it was this morning. I cannot find evidence of

any known drug, and his unconsciousness does not resemble any of the

many cases of hypnotic sleep which I saw in the Charcot Hospital in Paris. And as to these wounds"—he laid his finger gently on the bandaged wrist which lay outside the coverlet as he spoke, "I do not know what to make of them. They might have been made by a carding-machine; but that supposition is untenable. It is within the bounds of possibility that they might have been made by a wild animal if it had taken care to sharpen its claws. That too is, I take it, impossible. By the way, have you any strange pets here in the house; anything of an exceptional kind, such as a tiger-cat or anything out of the common?" Miss Trelawny smiled a sad smile which made my heart ache, as she made answer:

"Oh no! Father does not like animals about the house, unless they are dead and mummied." This was said with a touch of bitterness—or jealousy, I could hardly tell which. "Even my poor kitten was only allowed in the house on sufferance; and though he is the dearest and

best-conducted cat in the world, he is now on a sort of parole, and is not allowed into this room."

As she was speaking a faint rattling of the door handle was heard.

Instantly Miss Trelawny's face brightened. She sprang up and went over to the door, saying as she went:

"There he is! That is my Silvio. He stands on his hind legs and rattles the door handle when he wants to come into a room." She opened the door, speaking to the cat as though he were a baby: "Did him want his movver? Come then; but he must stay with her!" She lifted the cat, and came back with him in her arms. He was certainly a magnificent animal. A chinchilla grey Persian with long silky hair; a really lordly animal with a haughty bearing despite his gentleness; and with great paws which spread out as he placed them on the ground. Whilst she was fondling him, he suddenly gave a wriggle like an eel and slipped out of

her arms. He ran across the room and stood opposite a low table on

which stood the mummy of an animal, and began to mew and snarl. Miss

Trelawny was after him in an instant and lifted him in her arms, kicking

and struggling and wriggling to get away; but not biting or scratching,

for evidently he loved his beautiful mistress. He ceased to make a

noise the moment he was in her arms; in a whisper she admonished him:

"O you naughty Silvio! You have broken your parole that mother gave for

you. Now, say goodnight to the gentlemen, and come away to mother's

room!" As she was speaking she held out the cat's paw to me to shake.

As I did so I could not but admire its size and beauty. "Why," said I,

"his paw seems like a little boxing-glove full of claws." She smiled:

"So it ought to. Don't you notice that my Silvio has seven toes, see!"

she opened the paw; and surely enough there were seven separate claws,

each of them sheathed in a delicate, fine, shell-like case. As I gently

stroked the foot the claws emerged and one of them accidentally—there

was no anger now and the cat was purring—stuck into my hand.

Instinctively I said as I drew back:

"Why, his claws are like razors!"

Doctor Winchester had come close to us and was bending over looking at

the cat's claws; as I spoke he said in a quick, sharp way:

"Eh!" I could hear the quick intake of his breath. Whilst I was

stroking the now quiescent cat, the Doctor went to the table and tore

off a piece of blotting-paper from the writing-pad and came back. He

laid the paper on his palm and, with a simple "pardon me!" to Miss

Trelawny, placed the cat's paw on it and pressed it down with his other

hand. The haughty cat seemed to resent somewhat the familiarity, and

tried to draw its foot away. This was plainly what the Doctor wanted,

for in the act the cat opened the sheaths of its claws and and made

several reefs in the soft paper. Then Miss Trelawny took her pet away.

She returned in a couple of minutes; as she came in she said:

"It is most odd about that mummy! When Silvio came into the room

first—indeed I took him in as a kitten to show to Father—he went on

just the same way. He jumped up on the table, and tried to scratch and

bite the mummy. That was what made Father so angry, and brought the

decree of banishment on poor Silvio. Only his parole, given through me,

kept him in the house."

Whilst she had been gone, Doctor Winchester had taken the bandage from

her father's wrist. The wound was now quite clear, as the separate cuts

showed out in fierce red lines. The Doctor folded the blotting-paper

across the line of punctures made by the cat's claws, and held it down

close to the wound. As he did so, he looked up triumphantly and

beckoned us over to him.

The cuts in the paper corresponded with the wounds in the wrist! No explanation was needed, as he said;

"It would have been better if master Silvio had not broken his parole!"

We were all silent for a little while. Suddenly Miss Trelawny said:

"But Silvio was not in here last night!"

"Are you sure? Could you prove that is necessary?" She hesitated before replying:

"I am certain of it; but I fear it would be difficult to prove. Silvio sleeps in a basket in my room. I certainly put him to bed last night; I remember distinctly laying his little blanket over him, and tucking him in. This morning I took him out of the basket myself. I certainly

never noticed him in here; though, of course, that would not mean much,

for I was too concerned about poor father, and too much occupied with

him, to notice even Silvio."

The Doctor shook his head as he said with a certain sadness:

"Well, at any rate it is no use trying to prove anything now. Any cat

in the world would have cleaned blood-marks—did any exist—from his paws

in a hundredth part of the time that has elapsed."

Again we were all silent; and again the silence was broken by Miss

Trelawny:

"But now that I think of it, it could not have been poor Silvio that

injured Father. My door was shut when I first heard the sound; and

Father's was shut when I listened at it. When I went in, the injury had

been done; so that it must have been before Silvio could possibly have

got in.” This reasoning commended itself, especially to me as a barrister, for it was proof to satisfy a jury. It gave me a distinct pleasure to have Silvio acquitted of the crime—possibly because he was Miss Trelawny’s cat and was loved by her. Happy cat! Silvio’s mistress was manifestly pleased as I said:

“Verdict, ‘not guilty!’” Doctor Winchester after a pause observed:

“My apologies to master Silvio on this occasion; but I am still puzzled to know why he is so keen against that mummy. Is he the same toward the other mummies in the house? There are, I suppose, a lot of them. I saw three in the hall as I came in.”

“There are lots of them,” she answered. “I sometimes don’t know whether I am in a private house or the British Museum. But Silvio never concerns himself about any of them except that particular one. I suppose it must be because it is of an animal, not a man or a woman.”

"Perhaps it is of a cat!" said the Doctor as he started up and went across the room to look at the mummy more closely. "Yes," he went on,

"it is the mummy of a cat; and a very fine one, too. If it hadn't been a special favourite of some very special person it would never have received so much honour. See! A painted case and obsidian eyes-just like a human mummy. It is an extraordinary thing, that knowledge of kind to kind. Here is a dead cat—that is all; it is perhaps four or five thousand years old—and another cat of another breed, in what is

practically another world, is ready to fly at it, just as it would if it were not dead. I should like to experiment a bit about that cat if you don't mind, Miss Trelawny." She hesitated before replying:

"Of course, do anything you may think necessary or wise; but I hope it

will not be anything to hurt or worry my poor Silvio." The Doctor smiled as he answered:

"Oh, Silvio would be all right: it is the other one that my sympathies

would be reserved for."

"How do you mean?"

"Master Silvio will do the attacking; the other one will do the

suffering."

"Suffering?" There was a note of pain in her voice. The Doctor smiled

more broadly:

"Oh, please make your mind easy as to that. The other won't suffer as

we understand it; except perhaps in his structure and outfit."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Simply this, my dear young lady, that the antagonist will be a mummy

cat like this one. There are, I take it, plenty of them to be had in

Museum Street. I shall get one and place it here instead of that one —

you won't think that a temporary exchange will violate your Father's instructions, I hope. We shall then find out, to begin with, whether Silvio objects to all mummy cats, or only to this one in particular."

"I don't know," she said doubtfully. "Father's instructions seem very uncompromising." Then after a pause she went on: "But of course under the circumstances anything that is to be ultimately for his good must be done. I suppose there can't be anything very particular about the mummy of a cat."

Doctor Winchester said nothing. He sat rigid, with so grave a look on his face that his extra gravity passed on to me; and in its enlightening perturbation I began to realise more than I had yet done the strangeness of the case in which I was now so deeply concerned. When once this thought had begun there was no end to it. Indeed it grew, and

blossomed, and reproduced itself in a thousand different ways. The room

and all in it gave grounds for strange thoughts. There were so many

ancient relics that unconsciously one was taken back to strange lands

and strange times. There were so many mummies or mummy objects, round

which there seemed to cling for ever the penetrating odours of bitumen,

and spices and gums—"Nard and Circassia's balmy smells"—that one was

unable to forget the past. Of course, there was but little light in the

room, and that carefully shaded; so that there was no glare anywhere.

None of that direct light which can manifest itself as a power or an

entity, and so make for companionship. The room was a large one, and

lofty in proportion to its size. In its vastness was place for a

multitude of things not often found in a bedchamber. In far corners

of the room were shadows of uncanny shape. More than once as I thought,

the multitudinous presence of the dead and the past took such hold on me

that I caught myself looking round fearfully as though some strange

personality or influence was present. Even the manifest presence of

Doctor Winchester and Miss Trelawny could not altogether comfort or

satisfy me at such moments. It was with a distinct sense of relief that

I saw a new personality in the room in the shape of Nurse Kennedy.

There was no doubt that that business-like, self-reliant, capable young

woman added an element of security to such wild imaginings as my own.

She had a quality of common sense that seemed to pervade everything

around her, as though it were some kind of emanation. Up to that moment

I had been building fancies around the sick man; so that finally all

about him, including myself, had become involved in them, or enmeshed,

or saturated, or…But now that she had come, he relapsed into his

proper perspective as a patient; the room was a sick-room, and the

shadows lost their fearsome quality. The only thing which it could not

altogether abrogate was the strange Egyptian smell. You may put a mummy

in a glass case and hermetically seal it so that no corroding air can

get within; but all the same it will exhale its odour. One might think

that four or five thousand years would exhaust the olfactory qualities

of anything; but experience teaches us that these smells remain, and

that their secrets are unknown to us. Today they are as much mysteries

as they were when the embalmers put the body in the bath of natron…

All at once I sat up. I had become lost in an absorbing reverie. The

Egyptian smell had seemed to get on my nerves—on my memory—on my very

will.

At that moment I had a thought which was like an inspiration. If I was

influenced in such a manner by the smell, might it not be that the sick

man, who lived half his life or more in the atmosphere, had gradually

and by slow but sure process taken into his system something which had

permeated him to such degree that it had a new power derived from

quantity—or strength—or…

I was becoming lost again in a reverie. This would not do. I must take

such precaution that I could remain awake, or free from such entrancing

thought. I had had but half a night's sleep last night; and this night

I must remain awake. Without stating my intention, for I feared that I

might add to the trouble and uneasiness of Miss Trelawny, I went

downstairs and out of the house. I soon found a chemist's shop, and

came away with a respirator. When I got back, it was ten o'clock; the

Doctor was going for the night. The Nurse came with him to the door of

the sick-room, taking her last instructions. Miss Trelawny sat still

beside the bed. Sergeant Daw, who had entered as the Doctor went out,

was some little distance off.

When Nurse Kennedy joined us, we arranged that she should sit up till

two o'clock, when Miss Trelawny would relieve her. Thus, in accordance

with Mr. Trelawny's instructions, there would always be a man and a

woman in the room; and each one of us would overlap, so that at no time

would a new set of watchers come on duty without some one to tell of

what—if anything—had occurred. I lay down on a sofa in my own room,

having arranged that one of the servants should call me a little before

twelve. In a few moments I was asleep.

When I was waked, it took me several seconds to get back my thoughts so

as to recognise my own identity and surroundings. The short sleep had,

however, done me good, and I could look on things around me in a more

practical light than I had been able to do earlier in the evening. I

bathed my face, and thus refreshed went into the sick-room. I moved

very softly. The Nurse was sitting by the bed, quiet and alert; the

Detective sat in an armchair across the room in deep shadow. He did

not move when I crossed, until I got close to him, when he said in a

dull whisper:

"It is all right; I have not been asleep!" An unnecessary thing to say, I thought—it always is, unless it be untrue in spirit. When I told him that his watch was over; that he might go to bed till I should call him at six o'clock, he seemed relieved and went with alacrity. At the door he turned and, coming back to me, said in a whisper:

"I sleep lightly and I shall have my pistols with me. I won't feel so heavy-headed when I get out of this mummy smell."

He too, then, had shared my experience of drowsiness!

I asked the Nurse if she wanted anything. I noticed that she had a vinaigrette in her lap. Doubtless she, too, had felt some of the influence which had so affected me. She said that she had all she required, but that if she should want anything she would at once let me know. I wished to keep her from noticing my respirator, so I went to

the chair in the shadow where her back was toward me. Here I quietly

put it on, and made myself comfortable.

For what seemed a long time, I sat and thought and though. It was a

wild medley of thoughts, as might have been expected from the

experiences of the previous day and night. Again I found myself

thinking of the Egyptian smell; and I remember that I felt a delicious

satisfaction that I did not experience it as I had done. The respirator

was doing its work.

It must have been that the passing of this disturbing thought made for

repose of mind, which is the corollary of bodily rest, for, though I

really cannot remember being asleep or waking from it, I saw a vision—I

dreamed a dream, I scarcely know which.

I was still in the room, seated in the chair. I had on my respirator

and knew that I breathed freely. The Nurse sat in her chair with her

back toward me. She sat quite still. The sick man lay as still as the dead. It was rather like the picture of a scene than the reality; all were still and silent; and the stillness and silence were continuous. Outside, in the distance I could hear the sounds of a city, the occasional roll of wheels, the shout of a reveller, the far-away echo of whistles and the rumbling of trains. The light was very, very low; the reflection of it under the green-shaded lamp was a dim relief to the darkness, rather than light. The green silk fringe of the lamp had merely the colour of an emerald seen in the moonlight. The room, for all its darkness, was full of shadows. It seemed in my whirling thoughts as though all the real things had become shadows—shadows which moved, for they passed the dim outline of the high windows. Shadows which had sentience. I even thought there was sound, a faint sound as of the mew of a cat—the rustle of drapery and a metallic clink as of metal faintly touching metal. I sat as one entranced. At last I felt, as in nightmare, that this was sleep, and that in the passing of its portals

all my will had gone.

All at once my senses were full awake. A shriek rang in my ears. The room was filled suddenly with a blaze of light. There was the sound of pistol shots—one, two; and a haze of white smoke in the room. When my waking eyes regained their power, I could have shrieked with horror myself at what I saw before me.

Chapter IV

The Second Attempt

The sight which met my eyes had the horror of a dream within a dream,

with the certainty of reality added. The room was as I had seen it

last; except that the shadowy look had gone in the glare of the many

lights, and every article in it stood stark and solidly real.

By the empty bed sat Nurse Kennedy, as my eyes had last seen her,

sitting bolt upright in the armchair beside the bed. She had placed a

pillow behind her, so that her back might be erect; but her neck was

fixed as that of one in a cataleptic trance. She was, to all intents

and purposes, turned into stone. There was no special expression on her

face—no fear, no horror; nothing such as might be expected of one in

such a condition. Her open eyes showed neither wonder nor interest.

She was simply a negative existence, warm, breathing, placid; but

absolutely unconscious of the world around her. The bedclothes were

disarranged, as though the patient had been drawn from under them without throwing them back. The corner of the upper sheet hung upon the floor; close by it lay one of the bandages with which the Doctor had dressed the wounded wrist. Another and another lay further along the floor, as though forming a clue to where the sick man now lay. This was almost exactly where he had been found on the previous night, under the great safe. Again, the left arm lay toward the safe. But there had been a new outrage, an attempt had been made to sever the arm close to the bangle which held the tiny key. A heavy "kukri" knife—one of the leaf-shaped knives which the Gurkhas and others of the hill tribes of India use with such effect—had been taken from its place on the wall, and with it the attempt had been made. It was manifest that just at the moment of striking, the blow had been arrested, for only the point of the knife and not the edge of the blade had struck the flesh. As it was, the outer side of the arm had been cut to the bone and the blood

was pouring out. In addition, the former wound in front of the arm had

been cut or torn about terribly, one of the cuts seemed to jet out blood

as if with each pulsation of the heart. By the side of her father knelt

Miss Trelawny, her white nightdress stained with the blood in which she

knelt. In the middle of the room Sergeant Daw, in his shirt and

trousers and stocking feet, was putting fresh cartridges into his

revolver in a dazed mechanical kind of way. His eyes were red and

heavy, and he seemed only half awake, and less than half conscious of

what was going on around him. Several servants, bearing lights of

various kinds, were clustered round the doorway.

As I rose from my chair and came forward, Miss Trelawny raised her eyes

toward me. When she saw me she shrieked and started to her feet,

pointing towards me. Never shall I forget the strange picture she made,

with her white drapery all smeared with blood which, as she rose from

the pool, ran in streaks toward her bare feet. I believe that I had

only been asleep; that whatever influence had worked on Mr. Trelawny and

Nurse Kennedy—and in less degree on Sergeant Daw—had not touched me.

The respirator had been of some service, though it had not kept off the

tragedy whose dire evidences were before me. I can understand now—I

could understand even then—the fright, added to that which had gone

before, which my appearance must have evoked. I had still on the

respirator, which covered mouth and nose; my hair had been tossed in my

sleep. Coming suddenly forward, thus enwrapped and dishevelled, in that

horrified crowd, I must have had, in the strange mixture of lights, an

extraordinary and terrifying appearance. It was well that I recognised

all this in time to avert another catastrophe; for the half-dazed,

mechanically-acting Detective put in the cartridges and had raised his

revolver to shoot at me when I succeeded in wrenching off the respirator

and shouting to him to hold his hand. In this also he acted

mechanically; the red, half-awake eyes had not in them even then the

intention of conscious action. The danger, however, was averted. The

relief of the situation, strangely enough, came in a simple fashion.

Mrs. Grant, seeing that her young mistress had on only her nightdress,

had gone to fetch a dressing-gown, which she now threw over her. This

simple act brought us all back to the region of fact. With a long

breath, one and all seemed to devote themselves to the most pressing

matter before us, that of staunching the flow of blood from the arm of

the wounded man. Even as the thought of action came, I rejoiced; for

the bleeding was very proof that Mr. Trelawny still lived.

Last night’s lesson was not thrown away. More than one of those present

knew now what to do in such an emergency, and within a few seconds

willing hands were at work on a tourniquet. A man was at once

despatched for the doctor, and several of the servants disappeared to

make themselves respectable. We lifted Mr. Trelawny on to the sofa

where he had lain yesterday; and, having done what we could for him,

turned our attention to the Nurse. In all the turmoil she had not

stirred; she sat there as before, erect and rigid, breathing softly and

naturally and with a placid smile. As it was manifestly of no use to

attempt anything with her till the doctor had come, we began to think of

the general situation.

Mrs. Grant had by this time taken her mistress away and changed her

clothes; for she was back presently in a dressing-gown and slippers, and

with the traces of blood removed from her hands. She was now much

calmer, though she trembled sadly; and her face was ghastly white. When

she had looked at her father's wrist, I holding the tourniquet, she

turned her eyes round the room, resting them now and again on each one

of us present in turn, but seeming to find no comfort. It was so apparent to me that she did not know where to begin or whom to trust that, to reassure her, I said:

"I am all right now; I was only asleep." Her voice had a gulp in it as she said in a low voice:

"Asleep! You! and my Father in danger! I thought you were on the watch!" I felt the sting of justice in the reproach; but I really wanted to help her, so I answered:

"Only asleep. It is bad enough, I know; but there is something more than an "only" round us here. Had it not been that I took a definite precaution I might have been like the Nurse there." She turned her eyes swiftly on the weird figure, sitting grimly upright like a painted statue; and then her face softened. With the action of habitual courtesy she said:

"Forgive me! I did not mean to be rude. But I am in such distress and

fear that I hardly know what I am saying. Oh, it is dreadful! I fear

for fresh trouble and horror and mystery every moment." This cut me to

the very heart, and out of the heart's fulness I spoke:

"Don't give me a thought! I don't deserve it. I was on guard, and yet

I slept. All that I can say is that I didn't mean to, and I tried to

avoid it; but it was over me before I knew it. Anyhow, it is done now;

and can't be undone. Probably some day we may understand it all; but

now let us try to get at some idea of what has happened. Tell me what

you remember!" The effort to recollect seemed to stimulate her; she

became calmer as she spoke:

"I was asleep, and woke suddenly with the same horrible feeling on me

that Father was in great and immediate danger. I jumped up and ran,

just as I was, into his room. It was nearly pitch dark, but as I opened

the door there was light enough to see Father's nightdress as he lay on

the floor under the safe, just as on that first awful night. Then I

think I must have gone mad for a moment." She stopped and shuddered.

My eyes lit on Sergeant Daw, still fiddling in an aimless way with the

revolver. Mindful of my work with the tourniquet, I said calmly:

"Now tell us, Sergeant Daw, what did you fire at?" The policeman seemed

to pull himself together with the habit of obedience. Looking around at

the servants remaining in the room, he said with that air of importance

which, I take it, is the regulation attitude of an official of the law

before strangers:

"Don't you think, sir, that we can allow the servants to go away? We

can then better go into the matter." I nodded approval; the servants

took the hint and withdrew, though unwillingly, the last one closing the

door behind him. Then the Detective went on:

"I think I had better tell you my impressions, sir, rather than recount my actions. That is, so far as I remember them." There was a mortified deference now in his manner, which probably arose from his consciousness of the awkward position in which he found himself. "I went to sleep half-dressed—as I am now, with a revolver under my pillow. It was the last thing I remember thinking of. I do not know how long I slept. I had turned off the electric light, and it was quite dark. I thought I heard a scream; but I can't be sure, for I felt thick-headed as a man does when he is called too soon after an extra long stretch of work. Not that such was the case this time. Anyhow my thoughts flew to the pistol. I took it out, and ran on to the landing. Then I heard a sort of scream, or rather a call for help, and ran into this room. The room was dark, for the lamp beside the Nurse was out, and the only light was that from the landing, coming through the open door. Miss Trelawny was

kneeling on the floor beside her father, and was screaming. I thought I

saw something move between me and the window; so, without thinking, and

being half dazed and only half awake, I shot at it. It moved a little

more to the right between the windows, and I shot again. Then you came

up out of the big chair with all that muffling on your face. It seemed

to me, being as I say half dazed and half awake—I know, sir, you will

take this into account—as if it had been you, being in the same

direction as the thing I had fired at. And so I was about to fire again

when you pulled off the wrap." Here I asked him—I was cross-examining

now and felt at home:

"You say you thought I was the thing you fired at. What thing?" The

man scratched his head, but made no reply.

"Come, sir," I said, "what thing; what was it like?" The answer came in

a low voice:

"I don't know, sir. I thought there was something; but what it was, or

what it was like, I haven't the faintest notion. I suppose it was

because I had been thinking of the pistol before I went to sleep, and

because when I came in here I was half dazed and only half awake —which I

hope you will in future, sir, always remember." He clung to that

formula of excuse as though it were his sheet-anchor. I did not want to

antagonise the man; on the contrary I wanted to have him with us.

Besides, I had on me at that time myself the shadow of my own default;

so I said as kindly as I knew how:

"Quite right! Sergeant. Your impulse was correct; though of course in

the half-somnolent condition in which you were, and perhaps partly

affected by the same influence—whatever it may be—which made me sleep

and which has put the Nurse in that cataleptic trance, it could not be

expected that you would paused to weigh matters. But now, whilst the

matter is fresh, let me see exactly where you stood and where I sat. We

shall be able to trace the course of your bullets." The prospect of

action and the exercise of his habitual skill seemed to brace him at

once; he seemed a different man as he set about his work. I asked Mrs.

Grant to hold the tourniquet, and went and stood where he had stood and

looked where, in the darkness, he had pointed. I could not but notice

the mechanical exactness of his mind, as when he showed me where he had

stood, or drew, as a matter of course, the revolver from his pistol

pocket, and pointed with it. The chair from which I had risen still

stood in its place. Then I asked him to point with his hand only, as I

wished to move in the track of his shot.

Just behind my chair, and a little back of it, stood a high buhl

cabinet. The glass door was shattered. I asked:

"Was this the direction of your first shot or your second?" The answer

came promptly.

"The second; the first was over there!"

He turned a little to the left, more toward the wall where the great safe stood, and pointed. I followed the direction of his hand and came to the low table whereon rested, amongst other curios, the mummy of the cat which had raised Silvio's ire. I got a candle and easily found the mark of the bullet. It had broken a little glass vase and a tazza of black basalt, exquisitely engraved with hieroglyphics, the graven lines being filled with some faint green cement and the whole thing being polished to an equal surface. The bullet, flattened against the wall, lay on the table.

I then went to the broken cabinet. It was evidently a receptacle for valuable curios; for in it were some great scarabs of gold, agate, green jasper, amethyst, lapis lazuli, opal, granit, and blue-green china.

None of these things happily were touched. The bullet had gone through

the back of the cabinet; but no other damage, save the shattering of the

glass, had been done. I could not but notice the strange arrangement of

the curios on the shelf of the cabinet. All the scarabs, rings,

amulets, &c. were arranged in an uneven oval round an exquisitely-carved

golden miniature figure of a hawk-headed God crowned with a disk and

plumes. I did not wait to look further at present, for my attention was

demanded by more pressing things; but I determined to make a more minute

examination when I should have time. It was evident that some of the

strange Egyptian smell clung to these old curios; through the broken

glass came an added whiff of spice and gum and bitumen, almost stronger

than those I had already noticed as coming from others in the room.

All this had really taken but a few minutes. I was surprised when my

eye met, through the chinks between the dark window blinds and the

window cases, the brighter light of the coming dawn. When I went back

to the sofa and took the tourniquet from Mrs. Grant, she went over and

pulled up the blinds.

It would be hard to imagine anything more ghastly than the appearance of

the room with the faint grey light of early morning coming in upon it.

As the windows faced north, any light that came was a fixed grey light

without any of the rosy possibility of dawn which comes in the eastern

quarter of heaven. The electric lights seemed dull and yet glaring; and

every shadow was of a hard intensity. There was nothing of morning

freshness; nothing of the softness of night. All was hard and cold and

inexpressibly dreary. The face of the senseless man on the sofa seemed

of a ghastly yellow; and the Nurse’s face had taken a suggestion of

green from the shade of the lamp near her. Only Miss Trelawny's face

looked white; and it was of a pallor which made my heart ache. It

looked as if nothing on God's earth could ever again bring back to it

the colour of life and happiness.

It was a relief to us all when Doctor Winchester came in, breathless

with running. He only asked one question:

"Can anyone tell me anything of how this wound was gotten?" On seeing

the headshake which went round us under his glance, he said no more, but

applied himself to his surgical work. For an instant he looked up at

the Nurse sitting so still; but then bent himself to his task, a grave

frown contracting his brows. It was not till the arteries were tied and

the wounds completely dressed that he spoke again, except, of course,

when he had asked for anything to be handed to him or to be done for

him. When Mr. Trelawny's wounds had been thoroughly cared for, he said

to Miss Trelawny:

"What about Nurse Kennedy?" She answered at once:

"I really do not know. I found her when I came into the room at half-past two o'clock, sitting exactly as she does now. We have not moved her, or changed her position. She has not wakened since. Even Sergeant Daw's pistol-shots did not disturb her."

"Pistol-shots? Have you then discovered any cause for this new outrage?" The rest were silent, so I answered:

"We have discovered nothing. I was in the room watching with the Nurse. Earlier in the evening I fancied that the mummy smells were making me drowsy, so I went out and got a respirator. I had it on when I came on duty; but it did not keep me from going to sleep. I awoke to see the room full of people; that is, Miss Trelawny and Sergeant Daw, being only

half awake and still stupefied by the same scent or influence which had

affected us, fancied that he saw something moving through the shadowy

darkness of the room, and fired twice. When I rose out of my chair,

with my face swathed in the respirator, he took me for the cause of the

trouble. Naturally enough, he was about to fire again, when I was

fortunately in time to manifest my identity. Mr. Trelawny was lying

beside the safe, just as he was found last night; and was bleeding

profusely from the new wound in his wrist. We lifted him on the sofa,

and made a tourniquet. That is, literally and absolutely, all that any

of us know as yet. We have not touched the knife, which you see lies

close by the pool of blood. Look!" I said, going over and lifting it.

"The point is red with the blood which has dried."

Doctor Winchester stood quite still a few minutes before speaking:

"Then the doings of this night are quite as mysterious as those of last

night?”

“Quite!” I answered. He said nothing in reply, but turning to Miss

Trelawny said:

“We had better take Nurse Kennedy into another room. I suppose there is

nothing to prevent it?”

“Nothing! Please, Mrs. Grant, see that Nurse Kennedy’s room is ready;

and ask two of the men to come and carry her in.” Mrs. Grant went out

immediately; and in a few minutes came back saying:

“The room is quite ready; and the men are here.” By her direction two

footmen came into the room and, lifting up the rigid body of Nurse

Kennedy under the supervision of the Doctor, carried her out of the

room. Miss Trelawny remained with me in the sick chamber, and Mrs.

Grant went with the Doctor into the Nurse’s room.

When we were alone Miss Trelawny came over to me, and taking both my

hands in hers, said:

"I hope you won't remember what i said. I did not mean it, and I was

distraught." I did not make reply; but I held her hands and kissed

them. There are different ways of kissing a lady's hands. This way was

intended as homage and respect; and it was accepted as such in the

high-bred, dignified way which marked Miss Trelawny's bearing and every

movement. I went over to the sofa and looked down at the senseless man.

The dawn had come much nearer in the last few minutes, and there was

something of the clearness of day in the light. As I looked at the

stern, cold, set face, now as white as a marble monument in the pale

grey light, i could not but feel that there was some deep mystery beyond

all that had happened within the last twenty-six hours. Those beetling

brows screened some massive purpose; that high, broad forehead held some

finished train of reasoning, which the broad chin and massive jaw would

help to carry into effect. As I looked and wondered, there began to

steal over me again that phase of wandering thought which had last night

heralded the approach of sleep. I resisted it, and held myself sternly

to the present. This was easier to do when Miss Trelawny came close to

me, and, leaning her forehead against my shoulder, began to cry

silently. Then all the manhood in me woke, and to present purpose. It

was of little use trying to speak; words were inadequate to thought. But

we understood each other; she did not draw away when I put arm

protectingly over her shoulder as I used to do with my little sister

long ago when in her childish trouble she would come to her big brother

to be comforted. That very act or attitude of protection made me more

resolute in my purpose, and seemed to clear my brain of idle, dreamy

wandering in thought. With an instinct of greater protection, however,

I took away my arm as I heard the Doctor's footstep outside the door.

When Doctor Winchester came in he looked intently at the patient before

speaking. His brows were set, and his mouth was a thin, hard line.

Presently he said:

"There is much in common between the sleep of your Father and Nurse

Kennedy. Whatever influence has brought it about has probably worked the

same way in both cases. In Kennedy's case the coma is less marked. I

cannot but feel, however, that with her we may be able to do more and

more quickly than with this patient, as our hands are not tied. I have

placed her in a draught; and already she shows some signs, though very

faint ones, of ordinary unconsciousness. The rigidity of her limbs is

less, and her skin seems more sensitive—or perhaps I should say less

insensitive—to pain."

"How is it, then," I asked, "that Mr. Trelawny is still in this state of insensibility; and yet, so far as we know, his body has not had such rigidity at all?"

"That I cannot answer. The problem is one which we may solve in a few hours; or it may need a few days. But it will be a useful lesson in diagnosis to us all; and perhaps to many and many others after us, who knows!" he added, with the genuine fire of an enthusiast.

As the morning wore on, he flitted perpetually between the two rooms, watching anxiously over both patients. He made Mrs. Grant remain with the Nurse, but either Miss Trelawny or I, generally both of us, remained with the wounded man. We each managed, however, to get bathed and dressed; the Doctor and Mrs. Grant remained with Mr. Trelawny whilst we

had breakfast.

Sergeant Daw went off to report at Scotland Yard the progress of the

night; and then to the local station to arrange for the coming of his

comrade, Wright, as fixed with Superintendent Dolan. When he returned I

could not but think that he had been hauled over the coals for shooting

in a sick-room; or perhaps for shooting at all without certain and

proper cause. His remark to me enlightened me in the matter:

"A good character is worth something, sir, in spite of what some of them

say. See! I've still got leave to carry my revolver."

That day was a long and anxious one. Toward nightfall Nurse Kennedy so

far improved that the rigidity of her limbs entirely disappeared. She

still breathed quietly and regularly; but the fixed expression of her

face, though it was a calm enough expression, gave place to fallen

eyelids and the negative look of sleep. Doctor Winchester had, towards

evening, brought two more nurses, one of whom was to remain with Nurse

Kennedy and the other to share in the watching with Miss Trelawny, who

had insisted on remaining up herself. She had, in order to prepare for

the duty, slept for several hours in the afternoon. We had all taken

counsel together, and had arranged thus for the watching in Mr.

Trelawny's room. Mrs. Grant was to remain beside the patient till

twelve, when Miss Trelawny would relieve her. The new nurse was to sit

in Miss Trelawny's room, and to visit the sick chamber each quarter of

an hour. The Doctor would remain till twelve; when I was to relieve

him. One or other of the detectives was to remain within hail of the

room all night; and to pay periodical visits to see that all was well.

Thus, the watchers would be watched; and the possibility of such events

as last night, when the watchers were both overcome, would be avoided.

When the sun set, a strange and grave anxiety fell on all of us; and in

our separate ways we prepared for the vigil. Doctor Winchester had

evidently been thinking of my respirator, for he told me he would go out

and get one. Indeed, he took to the idea so kindly that I persuaded

Miss Trelawny also to have one which she could put on when her time for

watching came.

And so the night drew on.

Chapter V

More Strange Instructions

When I came from my room at half-past eleven o'clock I found all well in

the sick-room. The new nurse, prim, neat, and watchfull, sat in the

chair by the bedside where Nurse Kennedy had sat last night. A little

way off, between the bed and the safe, sat Dr. Winchester alert and

wakeful, but looking strange and almost comic with the respirator over

mouth and nose. As I stood in the doorway looking at them I heard a

slight sound; turning round I saw the new detective, who nodded, held up

the finger of silence and withdrew quietly. Hitherto no one of the

watchers was overcome by sleep.

I took a chair outside the door. As yet there was no need for me to

risk coming again under the subtle influence of last night. Naturally

my thoughts went revolving round the main incidents of the last day and

night, and I found myself arriving at strange conclusions, doubts,

conjectures; but I did not lose myself, as on last night, in trains of thought. The sense of the present was ever with me, and I really felt as should a sentry on guard. Thinking is not a slow process; and when it is earnest the time can pass quickly. It seemed a very short time indeed till the door, usually left ajar, was pulled open and Dr. Winchester emerged, taking off his respirator as he came. His act, when he had it off, was demostrative of his keenness. He turned up the outside of the wrap and smelled it carefully.

"I am going now," he said. "I shall come early in the morning; unless, of course, I am sent for before. But all seems well tonight."

The next to appear was Sergeant Daw, who went quietly into the room and took the seat vacated by the Doctor. I still remained outside; but every few minutes looked into the room. This was rather a form than a matter of utility, for the room was so dark that coming even from the dimly-lighted corridor it was hard to distinguish anything.

A little before twelve o'clock Miss Trelawny came from her room. Before

coming to her father's she went into that occupied by Nurse Kennedy.

After a couple of minutes she came out, looking, I thought, a trifle

more cheerful. She had her respirator in her hand, but before putting

it on, asked me if anything special had occurred since she had gone to

lie down. I answered in a whisper—there was no loud talking in the

house tonight—that all was safe, was well. She then put on her

respirator, and I mine; and we entered the room. The Detective and the

Nurse rose up, and we took their places. Sergeant Daw was the last to

go out; he closed the door behind him as we had arranged.

For a while I sat quiet, my heart beating. The place was grimly dark.

The only light was a faint one from the top of the lamp which threw a

white circle on the high ceiling, except the emerald sheen of the shade

as the light took its under edges. Even the light only seemed to

emphasize the blackness of the shadows. These presently began to seem,

as on last night, to have a sentience of their own. I did not myself

feel in the least sleepy; and each time I went softly over to look at

the patient, which I did about every ten minutes, I could see that Miss

Trelawny was keenly alert. Every quarter of an hour one or other of the

policemen looked in through the partly opened door. Each time both Miss

Trelawny and I said through our mufflers, “all right,” and the door was

closed again.

As the time wore on, the silence and the darkness seemed to increase.

The circle of light on the ceiling was still there, but it seemed less

brilliant than at first. The green edging of the lamp-shade became like

Maori greenstone rather than emerald. The sounds of the night without

the house, and the starlight spreading pale lines along the edges of the

window-cases, made the pall of black within more solemn and more

mysterious.

We heard the clock in the corridor chiming the quarters with its silver

bell till two o'clock; and then a strange feeling came over me. I could

see from Miss Trelawny's movement as she looked round, that she also had

some new sensation. The new detective had just looked in; we two were

alone with the unconscious patient for another quarter of an hour.

My heart began to beat wildly. There was a sense of fear over me. Not

for myself; my fear was impersonal. It seemed as though some new person

had entered the room, and that a strong intelligence was awake close to

me. Something brushed against my leg. I put my hand down hastily and

touched the furry coat of Silvio. With a very faint far-away sound of a

snarl he turned and scratched at me. I felt blood on my hand. I rose

gently and came over to the bedside. Miss Trelawny, too, had stood up

and was looking behind her, as though there was something close to her.

Her eyes were wild, and her breast rose and fell as though she were

fighting for air. When I touched her she did not seem to feel me; she

worked her hands in front of her, as though she was fending off

something.

There was not an instant to lose. I seized her in my arms and rushed

over to the door, threw it open, and strode into the passage, calling

loudly:

"Help! Help!"

In an instant the two Detectives, Mrs. Grant, and the Nurse appeared on

the scene. Close on their heels came several of the servants, both men

and women. Immediately Mrs. Grant came near enough, I placed Miss

Trelawny in her arms, and rushed back into the room, turning up the

electric light as soon as I could lay my hand on it. Sergeant Daw and the Nurse followed me.

We were just in time. Close under the great safe, where on the two succesive nights he had been found, lay Mr. Trelawny with his left arm, bare save for the bandages, stretched out. Close by his side was a leaf-shaped Egyptian knife which had lain amongst the curios on the shelf of the broken cabinet. Its point was stuck in the parquet floor, whence had been removed the bloodstained rug.

But there was no sign of disturbance anywhere; nor any sign of any one or anything unusual. The Policemen and I searched the room accurately, whilst the Nurse and two of the servants lifted the wounded man back to bed; but no sign or clue could we get. Very soon Miss Trelawny returned to the room. She was pale but collected. When she came close to me she

said in a low voice:

"I felt myself fainting. I did not know why; but I was afraid!"

The only other shock I had was when Miss Trelawny cried out to me, as I

placed my hand on the bed to lean over and look carefully at her father:

"You are wounded. Look! look! your hand is bloody. There is blood on

the sheets!" I had, in the excitement, quite forgotten Silvio's scratch.

As I looked at it, the recollection came back to me; but before I could

say a word Miss Trelawny had caught hold of my hand and lifted it up.

When she saw the parallel lines of the cuts she cried out again:

"It is the same wound as Father's!" Then she laid my hand down gently

but quickly, and said to me and to Sergeant Daw:

“Come to my room! Silvio is there in his basket.” We followed her, and

found Silvio sitting in his basket awake. He was licking his paws. The

Detective said:

“He is there sure enough; but why licking his paws?”

Margaret—Miss Trelawny—gave a moan as she bent over and took one of

the forepaws in her hand; but the cat seemed to resent it and snarled.

At that Mrs. Grant came into the room. When she saw that we were

looking at the cat she said:

“The Nurse tells me that Silvio was asleep on Nurse Kennedy’s bed ever

since you went to your Father’s room until a while ago. He came there

just after you had gone to master’s room. Nurse says that Nurse Kennedy

is moaning and muttering in her sleep as though she had a nightmare. I

think we should send for Dr. Winchester.”

“Do so at once, please!” said Miss Trelawny; and we went back to the

room.

For a while Miss Trelawny stood looking at her father, with her brows

wrinkled. Then, turning to me, as though her mind were made up, she

said:

“Don’t you think we should have a consultation on Father? Of course I

have every confidence in Doctor Winchester; he seems an immensely clever

young man. But he is a young man; and there must be men who have

devoted themselves to this branch of science. Such a man would have

more knowledge and more experience; and his knowledge and experience

might help to throw light on poor Father’s case. As it is, Doctor

Winchester seems to be quite in the dark. Oh! I don’t know what to do.

It is all so terrible!" Here she broke down a little and cried; and I tried to comfort her.

Doctor Winchester arrived quickly. His first thought was for his patient; but when he found him without further harm, he visited Nurse Kennedy. When he saw her, a hopeful look came into his eyes. Taking a towel, he dipped a corner of it in cold water and flicked on the face. The skin coloured, and she stirred slightly. He said to the new nurse — Sister Doris he called her:

"She is all right. She will wake in a few hours at latest. She may be dizzy and distraught at first, or perhaps hysterical. If so, you know how to treat her."

"Yes, sir!" answered Sister Doris demurely; and we went back to Mr. Trelawny's room. As soon as we had entered, Mrs. Grant and the Nurse went out so that only Doctor Winchester, Miss Trelawny, and myself

remained in the room. When the door had been closed Doctor Winchester

asked me as to what had occurred. I told him fully, giving exactly

every detail so far as I could remember. Throughout my narrative, which

did not take long, however, he kept asking me questions as to who had

been present and the order in which each one had come into the room. He

asked other things, but nothing of any importance; these were all that

took my attention, or remained in my memory. When our conversation was

finished, he said in a very decided way indeed, to Miss Trelawny:

"I think, Miss Trelawny, that we had better have a consultation on this

case." She answered at once, seemingly a little to his surprise:

"I am glad you have mentioned it. I quite agree. Who would you

suggest?"

"Have you any choice yourself?" he asked. "Any one to whom your Father

is known? Has he ever consulted any one?"

"Not to my knowledge. But I hope you will choose whoever you think

would be best. My dear Father should have all the help that can be had;

and I shall be deeply obliged by your choosing. Who is the best man in

London—anywhere else—in such a case?"

"There are several good men; but they are scattered all over the world.

Somehow, the brain specialist is born, not made; though a lot of hard

work goes to the completing of him and fitting him for his work. He

comes from no country. The most daring investigator up to the present

is Chiuni, the Japanese; but he is rather a surgical experimentalist

than a practitioner. Then there is Zammerfest of Uppsala, and Fenelon

of the University of Paris, and Morfessi of Naples. These, of course,

are in addition to our own men, Morrison of Aberdeen and Richardson of

Birmingham. But before them all I would put Frere of King's College. Of

all that I have named he best unites theory and practice. He has no

hobbies—that have been discovered at all events; and his experience is

immense. It is the regret of all of us who admire him that the nerve so

firm and the hand so dexterous must yield to time. For my own part I

would rather have Frere than any one living."

"Then," said Miss Trelawny decisively, "let us have Doctor Frere—by the

way, is he 'Doctor' or 'Mister'?—as early as we can get him in the

morning!"

A weight seemed removed from him, and he spoke with greater ease and

geniality than he had yet shown:

"He is Sir James Frere. I shall go to him myself as early as it is

possibly to see him, and shall ask him to come here at once." Then turning to me he said:

"You had better let me dress your hand."

"It is nothing," I said.

"Nevertheless it should be seen to. A scratch from any animal might turn out dangerous; there is nothing like being safe." I submitted; forthwith he began to dress my hand. He examined with a magnifying-glass the several parallel wounds, and compared them with the slip of blotting-paper, marked with Silvio's claws, which he took from his pocket-book. He put back the paper, simply remarking:

"It's a pity that Silvio slips in—and out—just when he shouldn't."

The morning wore slowly on. By ten o'clock Nurse Kennedy had so far recovered that she was able to sit up and talk intelligibly. But she

was still hazy in her thoughts; and could not remember anything that had

happened on the previous night, after her taking her place by the

sick-bed. As yet she seemed neither to know nor care what had happened.

It was nearly eleven o'clock when Doctor Winchester returned with Sir

James Frere. Somehow I felt my heart sink when from the landing I saw

them in the hall below; I knew that Miss Trelawny was to have the pain

of telling yet another stranger of her ignorance of her father's life.

Sir James Frere was a man who commanded attention followed by respect.

He knew so thoroughly what he wanted himself, that he placed at once on

one side all wishes and ideas of less definite persons. The mere flash

of his piercing eyes, or the set of his resolute mouth, or the lowering

of his great eyebrows, seemed to compel immediate and willing obedience

to his wishes. Somehow, when we had all been introduced and he was well

amongst us, all sense of mystery seemed to melt away. It was with a hopeful spirit that I saw him pass into the sick-room with Doctor Winchester.

They remained in the room a long time; once they sent for the Nurse, the new one, Sister Doris, but she did not remain long. Again they both went into Nurse Kennedy's room. He sent out the nurse attendant on her.

Doctor Winchester told me afterward that Nurse Kennedy, though she was ignorant of later matters, gave full and satisfactory answers to all Doctor Frere's questions relating to her patient up to the time she became unconscious. Then they went to the study, where they remained so long, and their voices raised in heated discussion seemed in such determined opposition, that I began to feel uneasy. As for Miss Trelawny, she was almost in a state of collapse from nervousness before they joined us. Poor girl! she had had a sadly anxious time of it, and her nervous strength had almost broken down.

They came out at last, Sir James first, his grave face looking as

unenlightening as that of the sphinx. Doctor Winchester followed him

closely; his face was pale, but with that kind of pallor which looked

like a reaction. It gave me the idea that it had been red not long

before. Sir James asked that Miss Trelawny would come into the study.

He suggested that I should come also. When we had enterd, Sir James

turned to me and said:

"I understand from Doctor Winchester that you are a friend of Miss

Trelawny, and that you have already considerable knowledge of this case.

Perhaps it will be well that you should be with us. I know you already

as a keen lawyer, Mr. Ross, though I never had the pleasure of meeting

you. As Doctor Winchester tells me that there are some strange matters

outside this case which seem to puzzle him—and others—and in which he

thinks you may yet be specially interested, it might be as well that you

should know every phase of the case. For myself I do not take much account of mysteries—except those of science; and as there seems to be some idea of an attempt at assassination or robbery, all I can say is that if assassins were at work they ought to take some elementary lessons in anatomy before their next job, for they seem thoroughly ignorant. If robbery were their purpose, they seem to have worked with marvellous inefficiency. That, however, is not my business." Here he took a big pinch of snuff, and turning to to Miss Trelawny, went on:

"Now as to the patient. Leaving out the cause of his illness, all we can say at present is that he appears to be suffering from a marked attack of catalepsy. At present nothing can be done, except to sustain his strength. The treatment of my friend Doctor Winchester is mainly such as I approve of; and I am confident that should any slight change arise he will be able to deal with it satisfactorily. It is an interesting case—most interesting; and should any new or abnormal development arise

I shall be happy to come at any time. There is just one thing to which

I wish to call your attention; and I put it to you, Miss Trelawny,

directly, since it is your responsibility. Doctor Winchester informs me

that you are not yourself free in the matter, but are bound by an

instruction given by your Father in case just such a condition of things

should arise. I would strongly advise that the patient be removed to

another room; or, as an alternative, that those mummies and all such

things should be removed from his chamber. Why, it's enough to put any

man into an abnormal condition, to have such an assemblage of horrors

round him, and to breathe the atmosphere which they exhale. You have

evidence already of how such mephitic odour may act. That nurse—

Kennedy, I think you said, Doctor—isn't yet out of her state of

catalepsy; and you, Mr. Ross, have, I am told, experienced something of

the same effects. I know this"—here his eyebrows came down more than

ever, and his mouth hardened—"if I were in charge here I should insist

on the patient having a different atmosphere; or I would throw up the

case. Doctor Winchester already knows that I can only be again

consulted on this condition being fulfilled. But I trust that you will

see your way, as a good daughter to my mind should, to looking to your

Father's health and sanity rather than to any whim of his—whether

supported or not by a foregoing fear, or by any number of "penny

dreadful" mysteries. The day has hardly come yet, I am glad to say,

when the British Museum and St. Thomas's Hospital have exchanged their

normal functions. Good-day, Miss Trelawny. I earnestly hope that I may

soon see your Father restored. Remember, that should you fulfil the

elementary condition which I have laid down, I am at your service day or

night. Good-morning, Mr. Ross. I hope you will be able to report to me

soon, Doctor Winchester."

When he had gone we stood silent, till the rumble of his carriage wheels

died away. The first to speak was Doctor Winchester:

"I think it well to say that to my mind, speaking purely as a physician,

he is quite right. I feel as if I could have assaulted him when he made

it a condition of not giving up the case; but all the same he is right

as to treatment. He does not understand that there is something odd

about this special case; and he will not realise knot that we are all

tied up in by Mr. Trelawny's instructions. Of course—" He was

interrupted by Miss Trelawny:

"Doctor Winchester, do you, too, wish to give up the case; or are you

willing to continue it under the conditions you know?"

"Give it up! Less now than ever. Miss Trelawny, I shall never give it

up, so long as life is left to him or any of us!" She said nothing, but

held out her hand, which he took warmly.

"Now," said she, "if Sir James Frere is a type of the cult of

Specialists, I want no more of them. To start with, he does not seem to

know any more than you do about my Father's condition; and if he were a

hundredth part as much interested in it as you are, he would not stand

on such punctilio. Of course, I am only too anxious about my poor

Father; and if I can see a way to meet either of Sir James Frere's

conditions, I shall do so. I shall ask Mr. Marvin to come here today,

and advise me as to the limit of Father's wishes. If he thinks I am

free to act in any way on my own responsibility, I shall not hesitate to

do so." Then Doctor Winchester took his leave.

Miss Trelawny sat down and wrote a letter to Mr. Marvin, telling him of

the state of affairs, and asking him to come and see her and to bring

with him any papers which might throw any light on the subject. She

sent the letter off with a carriage to bring back the solicitor; we

waited with what patience we could for his coming.

It is not a very long journey for oneself from Kensington Palace Gardens

to Lincoln's Inn Fields; but it seemed endlessly long when waiting for

someone else to take it. All things, however, are amenable to Time; it

was less than an hour all told when Mr. Marvin was with us.

He recognised Miss Trelawny's impatience, and when he had learned

sufficient of her father's illness, he said to her:

"Whenever you are ready I can go with you into particulars regarding

your Father's wishes."

"Whenever you like," she said, with an evident ignorance of his meaning.

"Why not now?" He looked at me, as to a fellow man of business, and

stammered out:

"We are not alone."

“I have brought Mr. Ross here on purpose,” she answered. “He knows so

much at present, that I want him to know more.” The solicitor was a

little disconcerted, a thing which those knowing him only in courts

would hardly have believed. He answered, however, with some hesitation:

“But, my dear young lady—Your Father’s wishes!—Confidence between father

and child—”

Here she interrupted him; there was a tinge of red in her pale cheeks as

she did so:

“Do you really think that applies to the present circumstances, Mr.

Marvin? My Father never told me anything of his affairs; and I can now,

in this sad extremity, only learn his wishes through a gentleman who is

a stranger to me and of whom I never even heard till I got my Father’s

letter, written to be shown to me only in extremity. Mr. Ross is a new

friend; but he has all my confidence, and I should like him to be

present. Unless, of course," she added, 'such a thing is forbidden by

my Father. Oh! forgive me, Mr. Marvin, if I seem rude; but I have been

in such dreadful trouble and anxiety lately, that I have hardly command

of myself." She covered her eyes with her hand for a few seconds; we

two men looked at each other and waited, trying to appear unmoved. She

went on more firmly; she had recovered herself:

"Please! please do not think I am ungrateful to you for your kindness in

coming here and so quickly. I really am grateful; and I have every

confidence in your judgment. If you wish, or think it best, we can be

alone." I stood up; but Mr. Marvin made a dissentient gesture. He was

evidently pleased with her attitude; there was geniality in his voice

and manner as he spoke:

"Not at all! Not at all! There is no restriction on your Father's

part; and on my own I am quite willing. Indeed, all told, it may be better. From what you have said of Mr. Trelawny's illness, and the other—incidental—matters, it will be well in case of any grave eventuality, that it was understood from the first, that circumstances were ruled by your Father's own imperative instructions. For, please understand me, his instructions are imperative—most imperative. They are so unyielding that he has given me a Power of Attorney, under which I have undertaken to act, authorising me to see his written wishes carried out. Please believe me once for all, that he intended fully everything mentioned in that letter to you! Whilst he is alive he is to remain in his own room; and none of his property is to be removed from it under any circumstances whatever. He has even given an inventory of the articles which are not to be displaced."

Miss Trelawny was silent. She looked somewhat distressed; so, thinking that I understood the immediate cause, I asked:

“May we see the list?” Miss Trelawny’s face at once brightened; but it

fell again as the lawyer answered promptly—he was evidently prepared for

the question:

“Not unless I am compelled to take action on the Power of Attorney. I

have brought that instrument with me. You will recognise, Mr. Ross”—he

said this with a sort of business conviction which I had noticed in his

professional work, as he handed me the deed—“how strongly it is worded,

and how the grantor made his wishes apparent in such a way as to leave

no loophole. It is his own wording, except for certain legal

formalities; and I assure you I have seldom seen a more iron-clad

document. Even I myself have no power to make the slightest relaxation

of the instructions, without committing a distinct breach of faith. And

that, I need not tell you, is impossible.” He evidently added the last

words in order to prevent an appeal to his personal consideration. He

did not like the seeming harshness of his words, however, for he added:

"I do hope, Miss Trelawny, that you understand that I am willing—

frankly and unequivocally willing—to do anything I can, within the

limits of my power, to relieve your distress. But your Father had, in

all his doings, some purpose of his own which he did not disclose to me.

So far as I can see, there is not a word of his instructions that he had

not thought over fully. Whatever idea he had in his mind was the idea

of a lifetime; he had studied it in every possible phase, and was

prepared to guard it at every point.

"Now I fear I have distressed you, and I am truly sorry for it; for I

see you have much—too much—to bear already. But I have no alternative.

If you want to consult me at any time about anything, I promise you I

will come without a moment's delay, at any hour of the day or night.

There is my private address," he scribbled in his pocket-book as he

spoke, “and under it the address of my club, where I am generally to be

found in the evening.” He tore out the paper and handed it to her. She

thanked him. He shook hands with her and with me and withdrew.

As soon as the hall door was shut on him, Mrs. Grant tapped at the door

and came in. There was such a look of distress in her face that Miss

Trelawny stood up, deadly white, and asked her:

“What is it, Mrs. Grant? What is it? Any new trouble?”

“I grieve to say, miss, that the servants, all but two, have given

notice and want to leave the house today. They have talked the matter

over among themselves; the butler has spoken for the rest. He says as

how they are willing to forego their wages, and even to pay their legal

obligations instead of notice; but that go today they must.”

“What reason do they give?”

“None, miss. They say as how they’re sorry, but that they’ve nothing to

say. I asked Jane, the upper housemaid, miss, who is not with the rest

but stops on; and she tells me confidential that they’ve got some notion

in their silly heads that the house is haunted!”

We ought to have laughed, but we didn’t. I could not look in Miss

Trelawny’s face and laugh. The pain and horror there showed no sudden

paroxysm of fear; there was a fixed idea of which this was a

confirmation. For myself, it seemed as if my brain had found a voice.

But the voice was not complete; there was some other thought, darker and

deeper, which lay behind it, whose voice had not sounded as yet.

Chapter VI

Suspicions

The first to get full self-command was Miss Trelawny. There was a haughty dignity in her bearing as she said:

"Very well, Mrs. Grant; let them go! Pay them up to today, and a month's wages. They have hitherto been very good servants; and the occasion of their leaving is not an ordinary one. We must not expect much faithfulness from any one who is beset with fears. Those who remain are to have in future double wages; and please send these to me presently when I send word." Mrs. Grant bristled with smothered indignation; all the housekeeper in her was outraged by such generous treatment of servants who had combined to give notice:

"They don't deserve it, miss; them to go on so, after the way they have been treated here. Never in my life have I seen servants so well

treated or anyone so good to them and gracious to them as you have been.

They might be in the household of a King for treatment. And now, just

as there is trouble, to go and act like this. It's abominable, that's

what it is!"

Miss Trelawny was very gentle with her, and smothered her ruffled

dignity; so that presently she went away with, in her manner, a lesser

measure of hostility to the undeserving. In quite a different frame of

mind she returned presently to ask if her mistress would like her to

engage a full staff of other servants, or at any rate try to do so.

"For you know, ma'am," she went on, "when once a scare has been

established in the servants" hall, it's wellnigh impossible to get rid

of it. Servants may come; but they go away just as quick. There's no

holding them. They simply won't stay; or even if they work out their

month's notice, they lead you that life that you wish every hour of the

day that you hadn't kept them. The women are bad enough, the huzzies;

but the men are worse!" There was neither anxiety nor indignation in

Miss Trelawny's voice or manner as she said:

"I think, Mrs. Grant, we had better try to do with those we have.

Whilst my dear Father is ill we shall not be having any company, so that

there will be only three now in the house to attend to. If those

servants who are willing to stay are not enough, I should only get

sufficient to help them to do the work. It will not, I should think, be

difficult to get a few maids; perhaps some that you know already. And

please bear in mind, that those whom you get, and who are suitable and

will stay, are henceforth to have the same wages as those who are

remaining. Of course, Mrs. Grant, you well enough understand that

though I do not group you in any way with the servants, the rule of

double salary applies to you too." As she spoke she extended her long,

fine-shaped hand, which the other took and then, raising it to her lips,

kissed it impressively with the freedom of an elder woman to a younger.

I could not but admire the generosity of her treatment of her servants.

In my mind I endorsed Mrs. Grant's sotto voce remark as she left the

room:

"No wonder the house is like a King's house, when the mistress is a

Princess!"

"A Princess!" That was it. The idea seemed to satisfy my mind, and to

bring back in a wave of light the first moment when she swept across my

vision at the ball in Belgrave Square. A queenly figure! tall and slim,

bending, swaying, undulating as the lily or the lotos. Clad in a

flowing gown of some filmy black material shot with gold. For ornament

in her hair she wore an old Egyptian jewel, a tiny crystal disk, set

between rising plumes carved in lapis lazuli. On her wrist was a broad

bangle or bracelet of antique work, in the shape of a pair of spreading

wings wrought in gold, with the feathers made of coloured gems. For all

her gracious bearing toward me, when our hostess introduced me, I was

then afraid of her. It was only when later, at the picnic on the river,

I had come to realise her sweet and gentle, that my awe changed to

something else.

For a while she sat, making some notes or memoranda. Then putting them

away, she sent for the faithful servants. I thought that she had better

have this interview alone, and so left her. When I came back there were

traces of tears in her eyes.

The next phase in which I had a part was even more disturbing, and

infinitely more painful. Late in the afternoon Sergeant Daw came into

the study where I was sitting. After closing the door carefully and

looking all round the room to make certain that we were alone, he came

close to me.

"What is it?" I asked him. "I see you wish to speak to me privately."

"Quite so, sir! May I speak in absolute confidence?"

"Of course you may. In anything that is for the good of Miss Trelawny—

and of course Mr. Trelawny—you may be perfectly frank. I take it that

we both want to serve them to the best of our powers." He hesitated

before replying:

"Of course you know that I have my duty to do; and I think you know me

well enough to know that I will do it. I am a policeman—a detective;

and it is my duty to find out the facts of any case I am put on, without

fear or favour to anyone. I would rather speak to you alone, in

confidence if I may, without reference to any duty of anyone to anyone,

except mine to Scotland Yard."

"Of course! of course!" I answered mechanically, my heart sinking, I did

not know why. "Be quite frank with me. I assure you of my confidence."

"Thank you, sir. I take it that what I say is not to pass beyond you—

not to anyone. Not to Miss Trelawny herself, or even to Mr. Trelawny

when he becomes well again."

"Certainly, if you make it a condition!" I said a little more stiffly.

The man recognised the change in my voice or manner, and said

apologetically:

"Excuse me, sir, but I am going outside my duty in speaking to you at

all on the subject. I know you, however, of old; and I feel that I can

trust you. Not your word, sir, that is all right; but your discretion!"

I bowed. "Go on!" I said. He began at once:

"I have gone over this case, sir, till my brain begins to reel; but I

can’t find any ordinary solution of it. At the time of each attempt no

one has seemingly come into the house; and certainly no one has got out.

What does it strike you is the inference?”

“That the somebody—or the something—was in the house already,” I

answered, smiling in spite of myself.

“That’s just what I think,” he said, with a manifest sigh of relief.

“Very well! Who can be that someone?”

“‘Someone, or something,’ was what I said,” I answered.

“Let us make it ‘someone,’ Mr. Ross! That cat, though he might have

scratched or bit, never pulled the old gentleman out of bed, and tried

to get the bangle with the key off his arm. Such things are all very

well in books where your amateur detectives, who know everything before

it’s done, can fit them into theories; but in Scotland Yard, where the

men aren't all idiots either, we generally find that when crime is done,

or attempted, it's people, not things, that are at the bottom of it."

"Then make it 'people' by all means, Sergeant."

"We were speaking of 'someone,' sir."

"Quite right. Someone, be it!"

"Did it ever strike you, sir, that on each of the three separate

occasions where outrage was effected, or attempted, there was one person

who was the first to be present and to give the alarm?"

"Let me see! Miss Trelawny, I believe, gave the alarm on the first

occasion. I was present myself, if fast asleep, on the second; and so

was Nurse Kennedy. When I woke there were several people in the room;

you were one of them. I understand that on that occasion also Miss

Trelawny was before you. At the last attempt I was Miss Trelawny

fainted. I carried her out and went back. In returning, I was first;

and I think you were close behind me."

Sergeant Daw thought for a moment before replying:

"She was present, or first, in the room on all the occasions; there was

only damage done in the first and second!"

The inference was one which I, as a lawyer, could not mistake. I

thought the best thing to do was to meet it half-way. I have always

found that the best way to encounter an inference is to cause it to be

turned into a statement.

"You mean," I said, "that as on the only occasions when actual harm was

done, Miss Trelawny's being the first to discover it is a proof that she

did it; or was in some way connected with the attempt, as well as the

discovery?"

"I didn't venture to put it as clear as that; but that is where the doubt which I had leads." Sergeant Daw was a man of courage; he evidently did not shrink from any conclusion of his reasoning on facts.

We were both silent for a while. Fears began crowding in on my own mind. Not doubts of Miss Trelawny, or of any act of hers; but fears lest such acts should be misunderstood. There was evidently a mystery somewhere; and if no solution to it could be found, the doubt would be cast on someone. In such cases the guesses of the majority are bound to follow the line of least resistance; and if it could be proved that any personal gain to anyone could follow Mr. Trelawny's death, should such ensue, it might prove a difficult task for anyone to prove innocence in the face of suspicious facts. I found myself instinctively taking that deferential course which, until the plan of battle of the prosecution is unfolded, is so safe an attitude for the defence. It would never do for

me, at this stage, to combar any theories which a detective might form.

I could best help Miss Trelawny by listening and understanding. When

the time should come for the dissipation and obliteration of the

theories, I should be quite willing to use all my militant ardour, and

all the weapons at my command.

"You will of course do your duty, I know," I said, "and without fear.

What course do you intend to take?"

"I don't know as yet, sir. You see, up to now it isn't with me even a

suspicion. If any one else told me that that sweet young lady had a

hand in such a matter, I would think him a fool; but I am bound to

follow my own conclusions. I know well that just as unlikely persons

have been proved guilty, when a whole court—all except the prosecution

who knew the facts, and the judge who had taught his mind to wait —would

have sworn to innocence. I wouldn't, for all the world, wrong such a

young lady; more especial when she has such a cruel weight to bear. And

you will be sure that I won't say a word that'll prompt anyone else to make such a charge. That's why I speak to you in confidence, man to man. You are skilled in proofs; that is your profession. Mine only gets so far as suspicions, and what we call our own proofs—which are nothing but ex parte evidence after all. You know Miss Trelawny better than I do; and though I watch round the sick-room, and go where I like about the house and in and out of it, I haven't the same opportunities as you have of knowing the lady and what her life is, or her means are; or of anything else which might give me a clue to her actions. If I were to try to find out from her, it would at once arouse her suspicions. Then, if she were guilty, all possibility of ultimate proof would go; for she would easily find a way to baffle discovery. But if she be innocent, as I hope she is, it would be doing a cruel wrong to accuse her. I have thought the matter over according to my lights before I spoke to you; and if I have taken a liberty, sir, I am truly sorry."

"No liberty in the world, Daw," I said warmly, for the man's courage and

honesty and consideration compelled respect. "I am glad you have spoken

to me so frankly. We both want to find out the truth; and there is so

much about this case that is strange—so strange as to go beyond all

experiences—that to aim at truth is our only chance of making anything

clear in the long-run—no matter what our views are, or what object we

wish to achieve ultimately!" The Sergeant looked pleased as he went on:

"I thought, therefore, that if you had it once in your mind that

somebody else held to such a possibility, you would by degrees get

proof; or at any rate such ideas as would convince yourself, either for

or against it. Then we would come to some conclusion; or at any rate we

should so exhaust all other possibilities that the most likely one would

remain as the nearest thing to proof, or strong suspicion, that we could

get. After that we should have to—”

Just at this moment the door opened and Miss Trelawny entered the room.

The moment she saw us she drew back quickly, saying:

“Oh, I beg pardon! I did not know you were here, and engaged.” By the

time I had stood up, she was about to go back.

“Do come in,” I said; “Sergeant Daw and I were only talking matters

over.”

Whilst she was hesitating, Mrs. Grant appeared, saying as she entered

the room: “Doctor Winchester is come, miss, and is asking for you.”

I obeyed Miss Trelawny’s look; together we left the room.

When the Doctor had made his examination, he told us that there was

seemingly no change. He added that nevertheless he would like to stay

in the house that night is he might. Miss Trelawny looked glad, and

sent word to Mrs. Grant to get a room ready for him. Later in the day,

when he and I happened to be alone together, he said suddenly:

"I have arranged to stay here tonight because I want to have a talk

with you. And as I wish it to be quite private, I thought the least

suspicious way would be to have a cigar together late in the evening

when Miss Trelawny is watching her father." We still kept to our

arrangement that either the sick man's daughter or I should be on watch

all night. We were to share the duty at the early hours of the morning.

I was anxious about this, for I knew from our conversation that the

Detective would watch in secret himself, and would be particularly alert

about that time.

The day passed uneventfully. Miss Trelawny slept in the afternoon; and

after dinner went to relieve the Nurse. Mrs. Grant remained with her, Sergeant Daw being on duty in the corridor. Doctor Winchester and I took our coffee in the library. When we had lit our cigars he said quietly:

"Now that we are alone I want to have a confidential talk. We are 'tiled,' of course; for the present at all events?"

"Quite so!" I said, my heart sinking as I thought of my conversation with Sergeant Daw in the morning, and of the disturbing and harrowing fears which it had left in my mind. He went on:

"This case is enough to try the sanity of all of us concerned in it. The more I think of it, the madder I seem to get; and the two lines, each continually strengthened, seem to pull harder in opposite directions."

"What two lines?" He looked at me keenly for a moment before replying.

Doctor Winchester's look at such moments was apt to be disconcerting.

It would have been so to me had I had a personal part, other than my

interest in Miss Trelawny, in the matter. As it was, however, I stood

it unruffled. I was now an attorney in the case; an amicus curiae in

one sense, in another retained for the defence. The mere thought that

in this clever man's mind were two lines, equally strong and opposite,

was in itself so consoling as to neutralise my anxiety as to a new

attack. As he began to speak, the Doctor's face wore an inscrutable

smile; this, however, gave place to a stern gravity as he proceeded:

"Two lines: Fact and—Fancy! In the first there is this whole thing;

attacks, attempts at robbery and murder; stupefyings; organised

catalepsy which points to either criminal hypnotism and thought

suggestion, or some simple form of poisoning unclassified yet in our

toxicology. In the other there is some influence at work which is not

classified in any book that I know—outside the pages of romance. I

never felt in my life so strongly the truth of Hamlet's words:

‘There are more things in Heaven and earth… Than are dreamt of in

your philosophy.’

“Let us take the ‘Fact’ side first. Here we have a man in his home;

amidst his own household; plenty of servants of different classes in the

house, which forbids the possibility of an organised attempt made from

the servants” hall. He is wealthy, learned, clever. From his

physiognomy there is no doubting that he is a man of iron will and

determined purpose. His daughter—his only child, I take it, a young

girl bright and clever—is sleeping in the very next room to his. There

is seemingly no possible reason for expecting any attack or disturbance

of any kind; and no reasonable opportunity for any outsider to effect

it. And yet we have an attack made; a brutal and remorseless attack,

made in the middle of the night. Discovery is made quickly; made with

that rapidity which in criminal cases generally is found to be not

accidental, but of premeditated intent. The attacker, or attackers, are

manifestly disturbed before the completion of their work, whatever their

ultimate intent may have been. And yet there is no possible sign of

their escape; no clue, no disturbance of anything; no open door or

window; no sound. Nothing whatever to show who had done the deed, or

even that a deed has been done; except the victim, and his surroundings

incidental to the deed!

"The next night a similar attempt is made, though the house is full of

wakeful people; and though there are on watch in the room and around it

a detective officer, a trained nurse, an earnest friend, and the man's

own daughter. The nurse is thrown into a catalepsy, and the watching

friend—though protected by a respirator—into a deep sleep. Even the

detective is so far overcome with some phase of stupor that he fires off

his pistol in the sick-room, and can't even tell what he thought he was

firing at. That respirator of yours is the only thing that seems to

have a bearing on the ‘fact’ side of the affair. That you did not lose

your head as the others did—the effect in such case being in proportion

to the amount of time each remained in the room—points to the

probability that the stupefying medium was not hypnotic, whatever else

it may have been. But again, there is a fact which is contradictory.

Miss Trelawny, who was in the room more than any of you—for she was in

and out all the time and did her share of permanent watching also—did

not seem to be affected at all. This would show that the influence,

whatever it is, does not affect generally—unless, of course, it was that

she was in some way inured to it. If it should turn out that it be some

strange exhalation from some of those Egyptian curios, that might

account for it; only, we are then face to face with the fact that Mr.

Trelawny, who was most of all in the room—who, in fact, lived more than

half his life in it—was affected worst of all. What kind of influence

could it be which would account for all these different and

contradictory effects? No! the more I think of this form of the

dilemma, the more I am bewildered! Why, even if it were that the attack, the physical attack, on Mr. Trelawny had been made by some one residing in the house and not within the sphere of suspicion, the oddness of the stupefyings would still remain a mystery. It is not easy to put anyone into a catalepsy. Indeed, so far as is known yet in science, there is no way to achieve such an object at will. The crux of the whole matter is Miss Trelawny, who seems to be subject to none of the influences, or possibly of the variants of the same influence at work. Through all she goes unscathed, except for that one slight semi-faint. It is most strange!”

I listened with a sinking heart; for, though his manner was not illuminative of distrust, his argument was disturbing. Although it was not so direct as the suspicion of the Detective, it seemed to single out Miss Trelawny as different from all others concerned; and in a mystery to be alone is to be suspected, ultimately if not immediately. I

thought it better not to say anything. In such a case silence is indeed

golden; and if I said nothing now I might have less to defend, or

explain, or take back later. I was, therefore, secretly glad that his

form of putting his argument did not require any answer from me—for the

present, at all events. Doctor Winchester did not seem to expect any

answer—a fact which, when I recognised it, gave my pleasure, I hardly

knew why. He paused for a while, sitting with his chin in his hand, his

eyes staring at vacancy, whilst his brows were fixed. His cigar was

held limp between his fingers; he had apparently forgotten it. In an

even voice, as though commencing exactly where he had left off, he

resumed his argument:

"The other horn of the dilemma is a different affair altogether; and if

we once enter on it we must leave everything in the shape of science and

experience behind us. I confess that it has its fascinations for me;

though at every new thought I find myself romancing in a way that makes

me pull up suddenly and look facts resolutely in the face. I sometimes

wonder whether the influence or emanation from the sick-room at times

affects me as it did the others—the Detective, for instance. Of course

it may be that if it is anything chemical, any drug, for example, in

vaporeal form, its effects may be cumulative. But then, what could

there be that could produce such an effect? The room is, I know, full

of mummy smell; and no wonder, with so many relics from the tomb, let

alone the actual mummy of that animal which Silvio attacked. By the

way, I am going to test him tomorrow; I have been on the trace of a

mummy cat, and am to get possession of it in the morning. Wnen I bring

it here we shall find out if it be a fact that racial instinct can

survive a few thousand years in the grave. However, to get back to the

subject in hand. These very mummy smells arise from the presence of

substances, and combinations of substances, which the Egyptian priests,

who were the learned men and scientists of their time, found by the

experience of centuries to be strong enough to arrest the natural forces

of decay. There must be powerful agencies at work to effect such a

purpose; and it is possible that we may have here some rare substance or

combination whose qualities and powers are not understood in this later

and more prosaic age. I wonder if Mr. Trelawny has any knowledge, or

even suspicion, of such a kind? I only know this for certain, that a

worse atmosphere for a sick chamber could not possibly be imagined; and

I admire the courage of Sir James Frere in refusing to have anything to

do with a case under such conditions. These instructions of Mr.

Trelawny to his daughter, and from what you have told me, the care with

which he has protected his wishes through his solicitor, show that he

suspected something, at any rate. Indeed, it would almost seem as if he

expected something to happen… .I wonder if it would be possible to

learn anything about that! Surely his papers would show or suggest

something… .It is a difficult matter to tackle; but it might have to

be done. His present condition cannot go on for ever; and if anything

should happen there would have to be an inquest. In such case full

examination would have to be made into everything… .As it stands,

the police evidence would show a murderous attack more than once

repeated. As no clue is apparent, it would be necessary to seek one in

a motive."

He was silent. The last words seemed to come in a lower and lower tone

as he went on. It had the effect of hopelessness. It came to me as a

conviction that now was my time to find out if he had any definite

suspicion; and as if in obedience to some command, I asked:

"Do you suspect anyone?" He seemed in a way startled rather than

surprised as he turned his eyes on me:

"Suspect anyone? Any thing, you mean. I certainly suspect that there

is some influence; but at present my suspicion is held within such

limit. Later on, if there be any sufficiently definite conclusion to my

reasoning, or my thinking-for there are not proper data for reasoning-I

may suspect; at present however-”

He stopped suddenly and looked at the door. There was a faint sound as

the handle turned. My own heart seemed to stand still. There was over

me some grim, vague apprehension. The interruption in the morning, when

I was talking with the Detective, came back upon me with a rush.

The door opened, and Miss Trelawny entered the room.

When she saw us, she started back; and a deep flush swept her face. For

a few seconds she paused; at such a time a few succeeding seconds seem

to lengthen in geometrical progression. The strain upon me, and, as I

could easily see, on the Doctor also, relaxed as she spoke:

"Oh, forgive me, I did not know that you were engaged. I was looking

for you, Doctor Winchester, to ask you if I might go to bed tonight

with safety, as you will be here. I feel so tired and worn-out that I

fear I may break down; and tonight I would certainly not be of any

use." Doctor Winchester answered heartily:

"Do! Do go to bed by all means, and get a good night's sleep. God

knows! you want it. I am more than glad you have made the suggestion,

for I feared when I saw you tonight that I might have you on my hands a

patient next."

She gave a sigh of relief, and the tired look seemed to melt from her

face. Never shall I forget the deep, earnest look in her great,

beautiful black eyes as she said to me:

"You will guard Father tonight, won't you, with Doctor Winchester? I

am so anxious about him that every second brings new fears. But I am

really worn-out; and if I don't get a good sleep, I think I shall go mad. I will change my room for tonight. I'm afraid that if I stay so close to Father's room I shall multiply every sound into a new terror. But, of course, you will have m e waked if there be any cause. I shall be in the bedroom of the little suite next the boudoir off the hall. I had those rooms when first I came to live with Father, and I had no care then… .It will be easier to rest there; and perhaps for a few hours I may forget. I shall be all right in the morning. Goodnight!"

When I had closed the door behind her and come back to the little table at which we had been sitting, Doctor Winchester said:

"That poor girl is overwrought to a terrible degree. I am delighted that she is to get a rest. It will be life to her; and in the morning she will be all right. Her nervous system is on the verge of a breakdown. Did you notice how fearfully disturbed she was, and how red she got when she came in and found us talking? An ordinary thing like

that, in her own house with her own guests, wouldn't under normal

circumstances disturb her!"

I was about to tell him, as an explanation in her defence, how her

entrance was a repetition of her finding the Detective and myself alone

together earlier in the day, when I remembered that that conversation

was so private that even an allusion to it might be awkward in evoking

curiosity. So I remained silent.

We stood up to go to the sick-room; but as we took our way through the

dimly-lighted corridor I could not help thinking, again and again, and

again—ay, and for many a day after—how strange it was that she had

interrupted me on two such occasions when touching on such a theme.

There was certainly some strange web of accidents, in whose meshes we

were all involved.

Chapter VII

The Traveller’s Loss

That night everything went well. Knowing that Miss Trelawny herself was

not on guard, Doctor Winchester and I doubled our vigilance. The Nurses

and Mrs. Grant kept watch, and the Detectives made their visit each

quarter of an hour. All night the patient remained in his trance. He

looked healthy, and his chest rose and fell with the easy breathing of a

child. But he never stirred; only for his breathing he might have been

of marble. Doctor Winchester and I wore our respirators, and irksome

they were on that intolerably hot night. Between midnight and three

o’clock I felt anxious, and had once more that creepy feeling to which

these last few nights had accustome me; but the grey of the dawn,

stealing round the edges of the blinds, came with inexpressible relief,

followed by restfulness, went through the household. During the hot

night my ears, strained to every sound, had been almost painfully

troubled; as though my brain or sensoriea were in anxious touch with

them. Every breath of the Nurse or the rustle of her dress; every soft

pat of slippered feet, as the Policeman went his rounds; every moment of

watching life, seemed to be a new impetus to guardianship. Something of

the same feeling must have been abroad in the house; now and again I

could hear upstairs the sound of restless feet, and more than once

downstairs the opening of a window. With the coming of the dawn,

however, all this ceased, and the whole household seemed to rest.

Doctor Winchester went home when Sister Doris came to relieve Mrs.

Grant. He was, I think, a little disappointed or chagrined that nothing

of an exceptional nature had happened during his long night vigil.

At eight o'clock Miss Trelawny joined us, and I was amazed as well as

delighted to see how much good her night's sleep had done her. She was

fairly radiant; just as I had seen her at our first meeting and at the

picnic. There was even a suggestion of colour in her cheeks, which,

however, looked startlingly white in contrast with her black brows and

scarlet lips. With her restored strength, there seemed to have come a

tenderness even exceeding that which she had at first shown to her sick

father. I could not but be moved by the loving touches as she fixed his

pillows and brushed the hair from his forehead.

I was wearied out myself with my long spell of watching; and now that

she was on guard I started off to be, blinking my tired eyes in the full

light and feeling the weariness of a sleepless night on me all at once.

I had a good sleep, and after lunch I was about to start out to walk to

Jermyn Street, when I noticed an importunate man at the hall door. The

servant in charge was the one called Morris, formerly the “odd man,” but

since the exodus of the servants promoted to be butler pro tem. The stranger was speaking rather loudly, so that there was no difficulty in understanding his grievance. The servant man was respectful in both words and demeanour; but he stood squarely in front of the great double door, so that the other could not enter. The first words which I heard from the visitor sufficiently explained the situation:

"That's all very well, but I tell you I must see Mr. Trelawny! What is the use of your saying I can't, when I tell you I must. You put me off, and off, and off! I came here at nine; you said then tha he was not up, and that as he was not well he could not be disturbed. I came at twelve; and you told me again he was not up. I asked then to see any of his household; you told me that Miss Trelawny was not up. Now I come again at three, and you tell me he is still in bed, and is not awake yet. Where is Miss Trelawny? 'She is occupied and must not be disturbed!' Well, she must be disturbed! Or some one must. I am here

about Mr. Trelawny's special business; and I have come from a place

where servants always begin by saying No. 'No' isn't good enough for me

this time! I've had three years of it, waiting outside doors and tents

when it took longer to get in than it did into the tombs; and then you

would think, too, the men inside were as dead as the mummies. I've had

about enough of it, I tell you. And when I come home, and find the door

of the man I've been working for barred, in just the same way and with

the same old answers, it stirs me up the wrong way. Did Mr. Trelawny

leave orders that he would not see me when I should come?"

He paused and excitedly mopped his forehead. The servant answered very

respectfully:

"I am very sorry, sir, if in doing my duty I have given any offence.

But I have my orders, and must obey them. If you would like to leave

any message, I will give it to Miss Trelawny; and if you will leave your

address, she can communicate with you if she wishes." The answer came

in such a way that it was easy to see that the speaker was a kind-hearted man, and a just one.

"My good fellow, I have no fault to find with you personally; and I am

sorry if I have hurt your feelings. I must be just, even if I am angry.

But it is enough to anger any man to find himself in the position I am.

Time is pressing. There is not an hour—not a minute—to lose! And yet

here I am, kicking my heels for six hours; knowing all the time that

your master will be a hundred times angrier than I am, when he hears how

the time has been fooled away. He would rather be waked out of a

thousand sleeps than not see me just at present-and before it is too

late. My God! it's simply dreadful, after all I've gone through, to

have my work spoiled at the last and be foiled in the very doorway by a

stupid flunkey! Is there no one with sense in the house; or with

authority, even if he hasn't got sense? I could mighty soon convince him that your master must be awakened; even if he sleeps like the Seven Sleepers-"

There was no mistaking the man's sincerity, or the urgency and importance of his business; from his point of view at any rate. I stepped forward.

"Morris," I said, "you had better tell Miss Trelawny that this gentleman wants to see her particularly. If she is busy, ask Mrs. Grant to tell her."

"Very good, sir!" he answered in a tone of relief, and hurried away.

I took the stranger into the little boudoir across the hall. As we went he asked me:

"Are you the secretary?"

"No! I am a friend of Miss Trelawny's. My name is Ross."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Ross, for your kindness!" he said. "My name

is Corbeck. I would give you my card, but they don't use cards where

I've come from. And if I had had any, I suppose they, too, would have

gone last night-"

He stopped suddenly, as though conscious that he had said too much. We

both remained silent; as we waited I took stock of him. A short, sturdy

man, brown as a coffee-berry; possibly inclined to be fat, but now lean

exceedingly. The deep wrinkles in his face and neck were not merely

from time and exposure; there were those unmistakable signs where flesh

or fat has fallen away, and the skin has become loose. The neck was

simply an intricate surface of seams and wrinkles, and sun-scarred with

the burning of the Desert. The Far East, the Tropic Seasons, and the

Desert—each can have its colour mark. But all three are quite

different; and an eye which has once known, can thenceforth easily

distinguish them. The dusky pallor of one; the fierce red-brown of the

other; and of the third, the dark, ingrained burning, as though it had

become a permanent colour. Mr. Corbeck had a big head, massive and

full; with shaggy, dark red-brown hair, but bald on the temples. His

forehead was a fine one, high and broad; with, to use the terms of

physiognomy, the frontal sinus boldly marked. The squareness of it

showed "ratiocination"; and the fulness under the eyes "language". He

had the short, broad nose that marks energy; the square chin-marked

despite a thick, unkempt beard-and massive jaw that showed great

resolution.

"No bad man for the Desert!" I thought as I looked.

Miss Trelawny came very quickly. When Mr. Corbeck saw her, he seemed

somewhat surprised. But his annoyance and excitement had not

disappeared; quite enough remained to cover up any such secondary and

purely exoteric feeling as surprise. But as she spoke he never took his

eyes off her; and I made a mental note that I would find some early

opportunity of investigating the cause of his surprise. She began with

an apology which quite smoothed down his ruffled feelings:

"Of course, had my Father been well you would not have been kept

waiting. Indeed, had not I been on duty in the sick-room when you

called the first time, I should have seen you at once. Now will you

kindly tell me what is the matter which so presses?" He looked at me and

hesitated. She spoke at once:

"You may say before Mr. Ross anything which you can tell me. He has my

fullest confidence, and is helping me in my trouble. I do not think you

quite understand how serious my Father's condition is. For three days

he has not waked, or given any sign of consciousness; and I am in

terrible trouble about him. Unhappily I am in great ignorance of my Father and his life. I only came to live with him a year ago; and I know nothing whatever of his affairs. I do not even know who you are,

or in what way your business is associated with him." She said this with a little deprecating smile, all conventional and altogether graceful; as though to express in the most genuine way her absurd ignorance.

He looked steadily at her for perhaps a quarter of a minute; then he spoke, beginning at once as though his mind were made up and his confidence established:

"My name is Eugene Corbeck. I am a Master of Arts and Doctor of Laws

and Master of Surgery of Cambridge; Doctor of Letters of Oxford; Doctor

of Science and Doctor of Languages of London University; Doctor of Philosophy of Berlin; Doctor of Oriental Languages of Paris. I have some other degrees, honorary and otherwise, but I need not trouble you

with them. Those I have name will show you that I am sufficiently feathered with diplomas to fly into even a sick-room. Early in life-fortunately for my interests and pleasures, but unfortunately for my pocket-I fell in with Egyptology. I must have been bitten by some powerful scarab, for I took it bad. I went out tomb-hunting; and managed to get a living of a sort, and to learn some things that you can't get out of books. I was in pretty low water when I met your Father, who was doing some explorations on his own account; and since then I haven't found that I have many unsatisfied wants. He is a real patron of the arts; no mad Egyptologist can ever hope for a better chief!"

He spoke with feeling; and I was glad to see that Miss Trelawny coloured up with pleasure at the praise of her father. I could not help noticing, however, that Mr. Corbeck was, in a measure, speaking as if against time. I took it that he wished, while speaking, to study his ground; to see how far he would be justified in taking into confidence the two strangers before him. As he went on, I could see that his

confidence kept increasing. When I thought of it afterward, and remembered what he had said, I realised that the measure of the information which he gave us marked his growing trust.

"i have been several times out on expeditions in Egypt for your Father;

and I have always found it a delight to work for him. Many of his treasures-and he has some rare ones, I tell you-he has procured through

me, either by my exploration or by purchase-or-or-otherwise. Your Father, Miss Trelawny, has a rare knowledge. He sometimes makes up his

mind that he wants to find a particular thing, of whose existence-if it still exists-he has become aware; and he will follow it all over the world till he gets it. I've been on just such a chase now."

He stopped suddenly, as suddenly as thought his mouth had been shut by

the jerk of a string. We waited; when he went on he spoke with a caution that was new to him, as though he wished to forestall our asking

any questions:

“I am not at liberty to mentions anything of my mission; where it was

to, what it was for, or anything at all about it. Such matters are in

confidence between Mr. Trelawny and myself; I am pledged to absolute

secrecy.”

He paused, and an embarrassed look crept over his face. Suddenly he

said:

“You are sure, Miss Trelawny, your Father is not well enough to see me

today?”

A look of wonderment was on her face in turn. But it cleared at once;—

she stood up, saying in a tone in which dignity and graciousness were

blended:

"Come and see for yourself!" She moved toward her father's room; he

followed, and I brought up the rear.

Mr. Corbeck entered the sick-room as though he knew it. There is an

unconscious attitude or bearing to persons in new surroundings which

there is no mistaking. Even in his anxiety to see his powerful friend,

he glanced for a moment round the room, as at a familiar place. Then

all his attention became fixed on the bed. I watched him narrowly, for

somehow I felt that on this man depended much of our enlightenment

regarding the strange matter in which we were involved.

It was not that I doubted him. The man was of transparent honesty; it

was this very quality which we had to dread. He was of that courageous,

fixed trueness to his undertaking, that if he should deem it his duty to

guard a secret he would do it to the last. The case before us was, at

least, an unusual one; and it would, consequently, require more liberal

recognition of bounds of the duty of secrecy than would hold under

ordinary conditions. To us, ignorance was helplessness. If we could

learn anything of the past we might at least form some idea of the

conditions antecedent to the attack; and might, so, achieve some means

of helping the patient to recovery. There were curios whish might be

removed… .My thoughts were beginning to whirl once again; I pulled

myself up sharply and watched. There was a look of infinite pity on the

sun-stained, rugged face as he gazed at his friend, lying so helpless.

The sternness of Mr. Trelawny's face had not relaxed in sleep; but

somehow it made the helplessness more marked. It would not have

troubled one to see a weak or an ordinary face under such conditions;

but this purposeful, masterful man, lying before us wrapped in

impenetrable sleep, had all the pathos of a great ruin. The sight was

not a new one to us; but I could see that Miss Trelawny, like myself,

was moved afresh by it in the presence of the stranger. Mr. Corbeck's

face grew stern. All the pity died away; and in its stead came a grim,

hard look which boded ill for whoever had been the cause of this mighty

downfall. This look in turn gave place to one of decision; the volcanic

energy of the man was working to some definite purpose. He glanced

around at us; and as his eyes lighted on Nurse Kennedy his eyebrows went

up a trifle. She noted the look, and glanced interrogatively at Miss

Trelawny, who flashed back a reply with a glance. She went quietly from

the room, closing the door behind her. Mr. Corbeck looked first at me,

with a strong man's natural impulse to learn from a man rather than a

woman; then at Miss Trelawny, with a remembrance of the duty of

courtesy, and said:

"Tell me all about it. How it began and when!" Miss Trelawny looked at

me appeallingly; and forthwith I told him all that I knew. He seemed to

make no motion during the whole time; but insensibly the bronze face

became steel. When, at the end, I told him of Mr. Marvin's visit and of

the Power of Attorney, his look began to brighten. And when, seeing his

interest in the matter, I went more into detail as to its terms, he

spoke:

"Good! Now I know where my duty lies!"

With a sinking heart I heard him. Such a phrase, coming at such a time,

seemed to close the door to my hopes of enlightenment.

"What do you mean?" I asked, feeling that my question was a feeble one.

His answer emphasized my fears:

"Trelawny knows what he is doing. He had some definite purpose in all

that he did; and we must not thwart him. He evidently expected

something to happen, and guarded himself at all points."

“Not at all points!” I said impulsively. “There must have been a weak

spot somewhere, or he wouldn’t be lying here like that!” Somehow his

impassiveness surprised me. I had expected that he would find a valid

argument in my phrase; but it did not move him, at least not in the way

I thought. Something like a smile flickered over his swarthy face as he

answered me:

“This is not the end! Trelawny did not guard himself to no purpose.

Doubtless, he expected this too; or at any rate the possibility of it.”

“Do you know what he expected, or from what source?” The questioner was

Miss Trelawny.

The answer came at once: “No! I know nothing of either. I can guess.

. .” He stopped suddenly.

"Guess what?" The suppressed excitement in the girl's voice was akin to

anguish. The steely look came over the swarthy face again; but there was

tenderness and courtesy in both voice and manner as he replied:

"Believe me, I would do anything I honestly could to relieve you

anxiety. But in this I have a higher duty."

"What duty?"

"Silence!" As he spoke the word, the strong mouth closed like a steel

trap.

We all remained silent for a few minutes. In the intensity of our

thinking, the silence became a positive thing; the small sounds of life

within and without the house seemed intrusive. The first to break it

was Miss Trelawny. I had seen an idea-a hope-flash in her eyes; but she

steadied herself before speaking:

"What was the urgent subject on which you wanted to see me, knowing that

my Father was-not available?" The pause showed her mastery of her

thoughts.

The instantaneous change in Mr. Corbeck was almost ludicrous. His start

of surprise, coming close upon his iron-clad impassiveness, was like a

pantomimic change. But all idea of comedy was swept away by the tragic

earnestness with which he remembered his original purpose.

"My God!" he said, as he raised his hand from the chair back on which it

rested, and beat it down with a violence which would in itself have

arrested attention. His brows corrugated as he went on: "I quite

forgot! What a loss! Now of all times! Just at the moment of success!

He lying there helpless, and my tongue tied! Not able to raise hand or

foot in my ignorance of his wishes!"

“What is it? Oh, do tell us! I am so anxious about my dear Father! Is it any new trouble? I hope not! oh, I hope not! I have had such anxiety and trouble already! It alarms me afresh to hear you speak so!

Won’t you tell me something to allay this terrible anxiety and uncertainty?”

He drew his sturdy form up to his full height as he said:

“Alas! I cannot, may not, tell you anything. It is his secret.” He pointed to the bed. “And yet-and yet I came here for his advice, his counsel, his assistance. And he lies there helpless… .And time is flying by us! It may soon be too late!”

“What is it? what is it?” broke in Miss Trelawny in a sort of passion of anxiety, her face drawn with pain. “Oh, speak! Say something! This anxiety, and horror, and mystery are killing me!” Mr. Corbeck calmed himself by a great effort.

"I may not tell you details; but I have had a great loss. My mission,

in which I have spent three years, was successful. I discovered all

that I sought-and more; and brought them home with me safely.

Treasures, priceless in themselves, but doubly precious to him by whose

wishes and instructions I sought them. I arrived in London only last

night, and when I woke this morning my precious charge was stolen.

Stolen in some mysterious way. Not a soul in London knew that I was

arriving. No one but myself knew what was in the shabby portmanteau

that I carried. My room had but one door, and that I locked and bolted.

The room was high in the house, five stories up, so that no entrance

could have been obtained by the window. Indeed, I had closed the window

myself and shut the hasp, for I wished to be secure in every way. This

morning the hasp was untouched… .And yet my portmanteau was empty.

The lamps were gone! …There! it is out. I went to Egypt to search

for a set of antique lamps which Mr. Trelawny wished to trace. With

incredible labour, and through many dangers, I followed them. I brought

them safe home… .And now!" He turned away much moved. Even his

iron nature was breaking down under the sense of loss.

Miss Trelawny stepped over and laid her hand on his arm. I looked at

her in amazement. All the passion and pain which had so moved her

seemed to have taken the form of resolution. Her form was erect, her

eyes blazed; energy was manifest in every nerve and fibre of her being.

Even her voice was full of nervous power as she spoke. It was apparent

that she was a marvellously strong woman, and that her strength could

answer when called upon.

"We must act at once! My Father's wishes must be carried out if it is

possible to us. Mr. Ross, you are a lawyer. We have actually in the

house a man whom you consider one of the best detectives in London.

Surely we can do something. We can begin at once!" Mr. Corbeck took

new life from her enthusiasm.

"Good! You are your Father's daughter!" was all he said. But his

admiration for her energy was manifested by the impulsive way in which

he took her hand. I moved over to the door. I was going to bring

Sergeant Daw; and from her look of approval, I knew that Margaret-Miss

Trelawny-understood. I was at the door when Mr. Corbeck called me back.

"One moment," he said, "before we bring a stranger on the scene. It

must be borne in mind that he is not to know what you know now, that the

lamps were the objects of a prolonged and difficult and dangerous

search. All I can tell him, all that he must know from any source, is

that some of my property has been stolen. I must describe some of the

lamps, especially one, for it is of gold; and my fear is lest the thief,

ignorant of its historic worth, may, in order to cover up his crime,

have it melted. I would willingly pay ten, twenty, a hundred, a thousand times its intrinsic value rather than have it destroyed. I shall tell him only what is necessary. So, please, let me answer any questions he may ask; unless, of course, I ask you or refer to either of you for the answer." We both nodded acquiescence. Then a thought struck me and I said:

"By the way, if it be necessary to keep this matter quiet it will be better to have it if possible a private job for the Detective. If once a thing gets to Scotland Yard it is out of our power to keep it quiet, and further secrecy may be impossible. I shall sound Sergeant Daw before he comes up. If I say nothing, it will mean that he accepts the task and will deal with it privately." Mr. Corbeck answered at once:

"Secrecy is everything. The one thing I dread is that the lamps, or some of them, may be destroyed at once." To my intense astonishment Miss Trelawny spoke out at once, but quietly, in a decided voice:

“They will not be destroyed; nor any of them!” Mr. Corbeck actually smiled in amazement.

“How on earth do you know?” he asked. Her answer was still more incomprehensible:

“I don’t know how I know it; but know it I do. I feel it all through me; as though it were a conviction which has been with me all my life!”

Chapter VIII

The Finding of the Lamps

Sergeant Daw at first made some demur; but finally agreed to advise

privately on a matter which might be suggested to him. He added that I

was to remember that he only undertook to advise; for if action were

required he might have to refer the matter to headquarters. With this

understanding I left him in the study, and brought Miss Trelawny and Mr.

Corbeck to him. Nurse Kennedy resumed her place at the bedside before

we left the room.

I could not but admire the cautious, cool-headed precision with which

the traveller stated his case. He did not seem to conceal anything, and

yet he gave the least possible description of the objects missing. He

did not enlarge on the mystery of the case; he seemed to look on it as

an ordinary hotel theft. Knowing, as I did, that his one object was to recover the articles before their identity could be obliterated, I could see the rare intellectual skill with which he gave the necessary matter and held back all else, though without seeming to do so. "Truly," thought I, "this man has learned the lesson of the Eastern bazaars; and with Western intellect has improved upon his masters!" He quite conveyed his idea to the Detective, who, after thinking the matter over for a few moments, said:

"Pot or scale? that is the question."

"What does that mean?" asked the other, keenly alert.

"An old thieves phrase from Birmingham. I thought that in these days of slang everyone knew that. In old times at Brum, which had a lot of small metal industries, the gold-and silver-smiths used to buy metal from almost anyone who came along. And as metal in small quantities

could generally be had cheap when they didn’t ask where it came from, it

got to be a custom to ask only one thing-whether the customer wanted the

goods melted, in which case the buyer made the price, and the melting-pot was always on the fire. If it was to be preserved in its present

state at the buyer’s option, it went into the scale and fetched standard

price for old metal.

“There is a good deal of such work done still, and in other places than

Brum. When we’re looking for stolen watches we often come across the

works, and it’s not possible to identify wheels and springs out of a

heap; but it’s not often that we come across cases that are wanted.

Now, in the present instance much will depend on whether the thief is a

good man-that’s what they call a man who knows his work. A first-class

crook will know whether a thing is of more value than merely the metal

in it; and in such case he would put it with someone who could place it

later on-in America or France, perhaps. By the way, do you think anyone

but yourself could identify your lamps?”

“No one but myself!”

“Are there others like them?”

“Not that I know of,” answered Mr. Corbeck; “though there may be others

that resemble them in many particulars.” The Detective paused before

asking again: “Would any other skilled person-at the British Museum, for

instance, or a dealer, or a collector like Mr. Trelawny, know the value-the artistic value-of the lamps?”

“Certainly! Anyone with a head on his houlders would see at a glance

that the things were valuable.”

The Detective’s face brightened. “Then there is a chance. If your door

was locked and the window shut, the goods were not stolen by the chance

of a chambermaid or a boots coming along. Whoever did the job went

after it special; and he ain't going to part with his swag without his

price. This must be a case of notice to the pawnbrokers. There's one

good thing about it, anyhow, that the hue and cry needn't be given. We

needn't tell Scotland Yard unless you like; we can work the thing

privately. If you wish to keep the thing dark, as you told me at the

first, that is our chance." Mr. Corbeck, after a pause, said quietly:

"I suppose you couldn't hazard a suggestion as to how the robbery was

effected?" The Policeman smiled the smile of knowledge and experience.

"In a very simple way, I have no doubt, sir. That is how all these

mysterious crimes turn out in the long-run. The criminal knows his work

and all the tricks of it; and he is always on the watch for chances.

Moreover, he knows by experience what these chances are likely to be,

and how they usually come. The other person is only careful; he doesn't

know all the tricks and pits that may be made for him, and by some

little oversight or other he falls into the trap. When we know all

about this case, you will wonder that you did not see the method of it

all along!" This seemed to annoy Mr. Corbeck a little; there was

decided heat in his manner as he answered:

"Look here, my good friend, there is not anything simple about this

case-except that the things were taken. The window was closed; the

fireplace was bricked up. There is only one door to the room, and that

I locked and bolted. There is no transom; I have heard all about hotel

robberies through the transom. I never left my room in the night. I

looked at the things before going to bed; and I went to look at them

again when I woke up. If you can rig up any kind of simple robbery out

of these facts you are a clever man. That's all I say; clever enough to

go right away and get my things back." Miss Trelawny laid her hand upon

his arm in a soothing way, and said quietly:

"Do not distress yourself unnecessarily. I am sure they will turn up."

Sergeant Daw turned to her so quickly that I could not help remembering

vividly his suspicions of her, already formed, as he said:

"May I ask, miss, on what you base that opinion?"

I dreaded to hear her answer, given to ears already awake to supicion;

but it came to me as a new pain or shock all the same:

"I cannot tell you how I know. But I am sure of it!" The Detective

looked at her for some seconds in silence, and then threw a quick glance

at me.

Presently he had a little more conversation with Mr. Corbeck as to his

own movements, the details of the hotel and the room, and the means of

identifying the goods. Then he went away to commence his inquiries, Mr.

Corbeck impressing on him the necessity for secrecy lest the thief

should get wind of his danger and destroy the lamps. Mr. Corbeck

promised, when going away to attend to various matters of his own

business, to return early in the evening, and to stay in the house.

All that day Miss Trelawny was in better spirits and looked in better

strength than she had yet been, despite the new shock and annoyance of

the theft which must ultimately bring so much disappointment to her

father.

We spent most of the day looking over the curio treasures of Mr.

Trelawny. From what I had heard from Mr. Corbeck I began to have some

idea of the vastness of his enterprise in the world of Egyptian

research; and with this light everything around me began to have a new

interest. As I went on, the interest grew; any lingering doubts which I

might have had changed to wonder and admiration. The house seemed to be

a veritable storehouse of marvels of antique art. In addition to the curios, big and little, in Mr. Trelawny's own room-from the great sarcophagi down to the scarabs of all kinds in the cabinets-the great hall, the staircase landings, the study, and even the boudoir were full of antique pieces which would have made a collector's mouth water.

Miss Trelawny from the first came with me, and looked with growing interest at everything. After having examined some cabinets of exquisite amulets she said to me in quite a naive way:

"You will hardly believe that I have of late seldom even looked at any

of these things. It is only since Father has been ill that I seem to

have even any curiosity about them. But now, they grow and grow on me to

quite an absorbing degree. I wonder if it is that the collector's blood which I have in my veins is beginning to manifest itself. If so, the strange thing is that I have not felt the call of it before. Of course

I know most of the big things, and have examined them more or less; but

really, in a sort of way I have always taken them for granted, as though

they had always been there. I have noticed the same thing now and again

with family pictures, and the way they are taken for granted by the

family. If you will let me examine them with you it will be

delightful!”

It was a joy to me to hear her talk in such a way; and her last

suggestion quite thrilled me. Together we went round the various rooms

and passages, examining and admiring the magnificent curios. There was

such a bewildering amount and variety of objects that we could only

glance at most of them; but as we went along we arranged that we should

take them seriatim, day by day, and examine them more closely. In the

hall was a sort of big frame of floriated steel work which Margaret said

her father used for lifting the heavy stone lids of the sarcophagi. It

was not heavy and could be moved about easily enough. By aid of this we

raised the covers in turn and looked at the endless series of

hieroglyphic pictures cut in most of them. In spite of her profession

of ignorance Margaret knew a good deal about them; her year of life with

her father had had unconsciously its daily and hourly lesson. She was a

remarkably clever and acute-minded girl, and with a prodigious memory;

so that her store of knowledge, gathered unthinkingly bit by bit, had

grown to proportions that many a scholar might have envied.

And yet it was all so naive and unconscious; so girlish and simple. She

was so fresh in her views and ideas, and had so little thought of self,

that in her companionship I forgot for the time all the troubles and

mysteries which enmeshed the house; and I felt like a boy again… .

The most interesting of the sarcophagi were undoubtedly the three in Mr.

Trelawny’s room. Of these, two were of dark stone, one of porphyry and

the other of a sort of ironstone. These were wrought with some

hieroglyphs. But the third was strikingly different. It was of some

yellow-brown substance of the dominating colour effect of Mexican onyx,

which it resembled in many ways, excepting that the natural pattern of

its convolutions was less marked. Here and there were patches almost

transparent-certainly translucent. The whole chest, cover and all, was

wrought with hundreds, perhaps thousands, of minute hieroglyphics,

seemingly in an endless series. Back, front, sides, edges, bottom, all

had their quota of the dainty pictures, the deep blue of their colouring

showing up fresh and sharply edge in the yellow stone. It was very

long, nearly nine feet; and perhaps a yard wide. The sides undulated,

so that there was no hard line. Even the corners took such excellent

curves that they pleased the eye. “Truly,” I said, “this must have been

made for a giant!”

“Or for a giantess!” said Margaret.

This sarcophagus stood near to one of the windows. It was in one

respect different from all the other sarcophagi in the place. All the

others in the house, of whatever material-granite, porphyry, ironstone,

basalt, slate, or wood-were quite simple in form within. Some of them

were plain of interior surface; others were engraved, in whole or part,

with hieroglyphics. But each and all of them had no protuberances or

uneven surface anywhere. They might have been used for baths; indeed,

they resembled in many ways Roman baths of stone or marble which I had

seen. Inside this, however, was a raised space, outlined like a human

figure. I asked Margaret if she could explain it in any way. For

answer she said:

"Father never wished to speak about this. It attracted my attention

from the first; but when I asked him about it he said: 'I shall tell

you all about it some day, little girl-if I live! But not yet! The

story is not yet told, as I hope to tell it to you! Some day, perhaps soon, I shall know all; and then we shall go over it together. And a mighty interesting story you will find it-from first to last!' Once afterward I said, rather lightly I am afraid: 'Is that story of the sarcophagus told yet, Father?' He shook his head, and looked at me gravely as he said: 'Not yet, little girl; but it will be-if I live-if I live!' His repeating that phrase about his living rather frightened me; I never ventured to ask him again."

Somehow this thrilled me. I could not exactly say how or why; but it seemed like a gleam of light at last. There are, I think, moments when the mind accepts something as true; though it can account for neither the course of the thought, nor, if there be more than one thought, the connection between them. Hitherto we had been in such outer darkness regarding Mr. Trelawny, and the strange visitation which had fallen on him, that anything which afforded a clue, even of the faintest and most

shadowy kind, had at the outset the enlightening satisfaction of a certainty. Here were two lights of our puzzle. The first that Mr. Trelawny associated with this particular curio a doubt of his own living. The second that he had some purpose or expectation with regard to it, which he would not disclose, even to his daughter, till complete.

Again it was to be borne in mind that this sarcophagus differed internally from all the others. What meant that odd raised place? I said nothing to Miss Trelawny, for I feared lest I should either frighten her or buoy her up with future hopes; but I made up my mind that I would take an early opportunity for further investigation.

Close beside the sarcophagus was a low table of green stone with red veins in it, like bloodstone. The feet were fashioned like the paws of a jackal, and round each leg was twined a full-throated snake wrought exquisitely in pure gold. On it rested a strange and very beautiful coffer or casket of stone of a peculiar shape. It was something like a small coffin, except that the longer sides, instead of being cut off

square like the upper or level part were continued to a point. Thus it

was an irregular septahedron, there being two planes on each of the two

sides, one end and a top and bottom. The stone, of one piece of which

it was wrought, was such as I had never seen before. At the base it was

of a full green, the colour of emerald without, of course, its gleam.

It was not by any means dull, however, either in colour or substance,

and was of infinite hardness and fineness of texture. The surface was

almost that of a jewel. The colour grew lighter as it rose, with

gradation so fine as to be imperceptible, changing to a fine yellow

almost of the colour of “mandarin” china. It was quite unlike anything

I had ever seen, and did not resemble any stone or gem that I knew. I

took it to be some unique mother-stone, or matrix of some gem. It was

wrought all over, except in a few spots, with fine hieroglyphics,

exquisitely done and coloured with the same blue-green cement or pigment

that appeared on the sarcophagus. In length it was about two feet and a

half; in breadth about half this, and was nearly a foot high. The vacant spaces were irregularly distributed about the top running to the pointed end. These places seemed less opaque than the rest of the stone. I tried to lift up the lid so that I might see if they were translucent; but it was securely fixed. It fitted so exactly that the whole coffer seemed like a single piece of stone mysteriously hollowed from within. On the sides and edges were some odd-looking protuberances wrought just as finely as any other portion of the coffer which had been sculptured by manifest design in the cutting of the stone. They had queer-shaped holes or hollows, different in each; and, like the rest, were covered with the hieroglyphic figures, cut finely and filled in with the same blue-green cement.

On the other side of the great sarcophagus stood another small table of alabaster, exquisitely chased with symbolic figures of gods and the signs of the zodiac. On this table stood a case of about a foot square composed of slabs of rock crystal set in a skeleton of bands of red

gold, beautifully engraved with hieroglyphics, and coloured with a blue

green, very much the tint of the figures on the sarcophagus and the

coffer. The whole work was quite modern.

But if the case was modern what it held was not. Within, on a cushion

of cloth of gold as fine as silk, and with the peculiar softness of old

gold, rested a mummy hand, so perfect that it startled one to see it. A

woman's hand, fine and long, with slim tapering fingers and nearly as

perfect as when it was given to the embalmer thousands of years before.

In the embalming it had lost nothing of its beautiful shape; even the

wrist seemed to maintain its pliability as the gentle curve lay on the

cushion. The skin was of a rich creamy or old ivory colour; a dusky

fair skin which suggested heat, but heat in shadow. The great

peculiarity of it, as a hand, was that it had in all seven fingers,

there being two middle and two index fingers. The upper end of the

wrist was jagged, as though it had been broken off, and was stained with

a red-brown stain. On the cushion near the hand was a small scarab, exquisitely wrought of emerald.

"That is another of Father's mysteries. When I asked him about it he said that it was perhaps the most valuable thing he had, except one. When I asked him what that one was, he refused to tell me, and forbade me to ask him anything concerning it. 'I will tell you,' he said, 'all about it, too, in good time-if I live!'"

"If I live!" the phrase again. These three things grouped together, the Sarcophagus, the Coffer, and the Hand, seemed to make a trilogy of mystery indeed!

At this time Miss Trelawny was sent for on some domestic matter. I looked at the other curios in the room; but they did not seem to have anything like the same charm for me, now that she was away. Later on in the day I was sent for to the boudoir where she was consulting with Mrs.

Grant as to the lodgment of Mr. Corbeck. They were in doubt as to

whether he should have a room close to Mr. Trelawny's or quite away from

it, and had thought it well to ask my advice on the subject. I came to

the conclusion that he had better not be too near; for the first at all

events, he could easily be moved closer if necessary. When Mrs. Grant

had gone, I asked Miss Trelawny how it came that the furniture of this

room, the boudoir in which we were, was so different from the other

rooms of the house.

"Father's forethought!" she answered. "When I first came, he thought,

and rightly enough, that I might get frightened with so many records of

death and the tomb everywhere. So he had this room and the little suite

off it-that door opens into the sitting-room-where I slept last night,

furnished with pretty things. You see, they are all beautiful. That

cabinet belonged to the great Napoleon."

“There is nothing Egyptian in these rooms at all then?” I asked, rather

to show interest in what she had said than anything else, for the furnishing of the room was apparent. “What a lovely cabinet! May I look at it?”

“Of course! with the greatest pleasure!” she answered, with a smile. “Its finishing, within and without, Father says, is absolutely complete.” I stepped over and looked at it closely. It was made of tulip wood, inlaid in patterns; and was mounted in ormolu. I pulled open one of the drawers, a deep one where I could see the work to great

advantage. As I pulled it, something rattled inside as though rolling; there was a tinkle as of metal on metal.

“Hullo!” I said. “There is something in here. Perhaps I had better not open it.”

“There is nothing that I know of,” she answered. “Some of the housemaids may have used it to put something by for the time and forgotten it. Open it by all means!”

I pulled open the drawer; as I did so, both Miss Trelawny and I started

back in amazement.

There before our eyes lay a number of ancient Egyptian lamps, of various

sizes and of strangely varied shapes.

We leaned over them and looked closely. My own heart was beating like a

trip-hammer; and I could see by the heaving of Margaret's bosom that

she was strangely excited.

Whilst we looked, afraid to touch and almost afraid to think, there was

a ring at the front door; immediately afterwards Mr. Corbeck, followed

by Sergeant Daw, came into the hall. The door of the boudoir was open,

and when they saw us Mr. Corbeck came running in, followed more slowly

by the Detective. There was a sort of chastened joy in his face and manner as he said impulsively:

"Rejoice with me, my dear Miss Trelawny, my luggage has come and all my things are intact!" Then his face fell as he added, "Except the lamps. The lamps that were worth all the rest a thousand times… ." He stopped, struck by the strange pallor of her face. Then his eyes, following her look and mine, lit on the cluster of lamps in the drawer. He gave a sort of cry of surprise and joy as he bent over and touched them:

"My lamps! My lamps! Then they are safe-safe-safe! … But how, in the name of God-of all the Gods-did they come here?"

We all stood silent. The Detective made a deep sound of intaking breath. I looked at him, and as he caught my glance he turned his eyes on Miss Trelawny whose back was toward him.

There was in them the same look of suspicion which had been there when

he had spoken to me of her being the first to find her father on the

occasions of the attacks.

Chapter IX

The Need of Knowledge

Mr. Corbeck seemed to go almost off his head at the recovery of the

lamps. He took them up one by one and looked them all over tenderly, as

though they were things that he loved. In his delight and excitement he

breathed so hard that it seemed almost like a cat purring. Sergeant Daw

said quietly, his voice breaking the silence like a discord in a melody:

"Are you quite sure those lamps are the ones you had, and that were

stolen?"

His answer was in an indignant tone: "Sure! Of course I'm sure. There

isn't another set of lamps like these in the world!"

"So far as you know!" The Detective's words were smooth enough, but his

manner was so exasperating that I was sure he had some motive in it; so

I waited in silence. He went on:

"Of course there may be some in the British Museum; or Mr. Trelawny may

have had these already. There's nothing new under the sun, you know,

Mr. Corbeck; not even in Egypt. These may be the originals, and yours

may have been the copies. Are there any points by which you can

identify these as yours?"

Mr. Corbeck was really angry by this time. He forgot his reserve; and

in his indignation poured forth a torrent of almost incoherent, but

enlightening, broken sentences:

"Identify! Copies of them! British Museum! Rot! Perhaps they keep a

set in Scotland Yard for teaching idiot policemen Egyptology! Do I know

them? When I have carried them about my body, in the desert, for three

months; and lay awake night after night to watch them! When I have

looked them over with a magnifying-glass, hour after hour, till my eyes

ached; till every tiny blotch, and chip, and dinge became as familiar to

me as his chart to a captain; as familiar as they doubtless have been

all the time to every thick-headed area-prowler within the bounds of

mortality. See here, young man, look at these!" He ranged the lamps in

a row on the top of the cabinet. "Did you ever see a set of lamps of

these shapes-of any one of these shapes? Look at these dominant figures

on them! Did you ever see so complete a set-even in Scotland Yard; even

in Bow Street? Look! one on each, the seven forms of Hathor. Look at

that figure of the Ka of a Princess of the Two Egypts, standing between

Ra and Osiris in the Boat of the Dead, with the Eye of Sleep, supported

on legs, bending before her; and Harmochis rising in the north. Will

you find that in the British Museum-or Bow Street? Or perhaps your

studies in the Gizeh Museum, or the Fitzwilliam, or Paris, or Leyden, or

Berlin, have shown you that the episode is common in hieroglyphics; and

that this is only a copy. Perhaps you can tell me what that figure of

Ptah-Seker-Ausar holding the Tet wrapped in the Sceptre of Papyrus

means? Did you ever see it before; even in the British Museum, or

Gizeh, or Scotland Yard?”

He broke off suddenly; and then went on in quite a different way:

“Look here! it seems to me that the thick-headed idiot is myself! I beg

your pardon, old fellow, for my rudeness. I quite lost my temper at the

suggestion that I do not know these lamps. You don’t mind, do you?”

The Detective answered heartily:

“Lord, sir, not I. I like to see folks angry when I am dealing with

them, whether they are on my side or the other. It is when people are

angry that you learn the truth from them. I keep cool; that is my

trade! Do you know, you have told me more about those lamps in the past

two minutes than when you filled me up with details of how to identify

them."

Mr. Corbeck grunted; he was not pleased at having given himself away.

All at once he turned to me and said in his natural way:

"Now tell me how you got them back?" I was so surprised that I said

without thinking:

"We didn't get them back!" The traveller laughed openly.

"What on earth do you mean?" he asked. "You didn't get them back! Why,

there they are before your eyes! We found you looking at them when we

came in." By this time I had recovered my surprise and had my wits

about me.

"Why, that's just it," I said. "We had only come across them, by accident, that very moment!"

Mr. Corbeck drew back and looked hard at Miss Trelawny and myself; turning his eyes from one to the other as he asked:

"Do you mean to tell me that no one brought them here; that you found them in that drawer? That, so to speak, no one at all brought them back?"

"I suppose someone must have brought them here; they couldn't have come of their own accord. But who it was, or when, or how, neither of us knows. We shall have to make inquiry, and see if any of the servants know anything of it."

We all stood silent for several seconds. It seemed a long time. The first to speak was the Detective, who said in an unconscious way:

“Well, I’m damned! I beg your pardon, miss!” Then his mouth shut like

a steel trap.

We called up the servants, one by one, and asked them if they knew

anything of some articles placed in a drawer in the boudoir; but none of

them could throw any light on the circumstance. We did not tell them

what the articles were; or let them see them.

Mr. Corbeck packed the lamps in cotton wool, and placed them in a tin

box. This, I may mention incidentally, was then brought up to the

detectives’ room, where one of the men stood guard over them with a

revolver the whole night. Next day we got a small safe into the house,

and placed them in it. There were two different keys. One of them I

kept myself; the other I placed in my drawer in the Safe Deposit vault.

We were all determined that the lamps should not be lost again.

About an hour after we had found the lamps, Doctor Winchester arrived.

He had a large parcel with him, which, when unwrapped, proved to be the

mummy of a cat. With Miss Trelawny's permission he placed this in the

boudoir; and Silvio was brought close to it. To the surprise of us all,

however, except perhaps Doctor Winchester, he did not manifest the least

annoyance; he took no notice of it whatever. He stood on the table

close beside it, purring loudly. Then, following out his plan, the

Doctor brought him into Mr. Trelawny's room, we all following. Doctor

Winchester was excited; Miss Trelawny anxious. I was more than

interested myself, for I began to have a glimmering of the Doctor's

idea. The Detective was calmly and coldly superior; but Mr. Corbeck,

who was an enthusiast, was full of eager curiosity.

The moment Doctor Winchester got into the room, Silvio began to mew and

wriggle; and jumping out of his arms, ran over to the cat mummy and

began to scratch angrily at it. Miss Trelawny had some difficulty in

taking him away; but so soon as he was out of the room he became quiet.

When she came back there was a clamour of comments:

"I thought so!" from the Doctor.

"What can it mean?" from Miss Trelawny.

"That's a very strange thing!" from Mr. Corbeck.

"Odd! but it doesn't prove anything!" from the Detective.

"I suspend my judgment!" from myself, thinking it advisable to say something.

Then by common consent we dropped the theme—for the present.

In my room that evening I was making some notes of what had happened,

when there came a low tap on the door. In obedience to my summons

Sergeant Daw came in, carefully closing the door behind him.

"Well, Sergeant," said I, 'sit down. What is it?"

"I wanted to speak to you, sir, about those lamps." I nodded and

waited: he went on: "You know that that room where they were found

opens directly into the room where Miss Trelawny slept last night?"

"Yes."

"During the night a window somewhere in that part of the house was

opened, and shut again. I heard it, and took a look round; but I could

see no sign of anything."

"Yes, I know that!" I said; "I heard a window moved myself."

"Does nothing strike you as strange about it, sir?"

“Strange!” I said; “Strange! why it’s all the most bewildering,

maddening thing I have ever encountered. It is all so strange that one

seems to wonder, and simply waits for what will happen next. But what

do you mean by strange?”

The Detective paused, as if choosing his words to begin; and then said

deliberately:

“You see, I am not one who believes in magic and such things. I am for

facts all the time; and I always find in the long-run that there is a

reason and a cause for everything. This new gentleman says these things

were stolen out of his room in the hotel. The lamps, I take it from

some things he has said, really belong to Mr. Trelawny. His daughter,

the lady of the house, having left the room she usually occupies, sleeps

that night on the ground floor. A window is heard to open and shut

during the night. When we, who have been during the day trying to find

a clue to the robbery, come to the house, we find the stolen goods in a

room close to where she slept, and opening out of it!”

He stopped. I felt that same sense of pain and apprehension, which I

had experienced when he had spoken to me before, creeping, or rather

rushing, over me again. I had to face the matter out, however. My

relations with her, and the feeling toward her which I now knew full

well meant a very deep love and devotion, demanded so much. I said as

calmly as I could, for I knew the keen eyes of the skilful investigator

were on me:

“And the inference?”

He answered with the cool audacity of conviction:

“The inference to me is that there was no robbery at all. The goods

were taken by someone to this house, where they were received through a

window on the ground floor. They were placed in the cabinet, ready to

be discovered when the proper time should come!”

Somehow I felt relieved; the assumption was too monstrous. I did not

want, however, my relief to be apparent, so I answered as gravely as I

could:

“And who do you suppose brought them to the house?”

“I keep my mind open as to that. Possibly Mr. Corbeck himself; the

matter might be too risky to trust to a third party.”

“Then the natural extension of your inference is that Mr. Corbeck is a

liar and a fraud; and that he is in conspiracy with Miss Trelawny to

deceive someone or other about those lamps.”

“Those are harsh words, Mr. Ross. They’re so plain-spoken that they

bring a man up standing, and make new doubts for him. But I have to go

where my reason points. It may be that there is another party than Miss

Trelawny in it. Indeed, if it hadn't been for the other matter that set

me thinking and bred doubts of its own about her, I wouldn't dream of

mixing her up in this. But I'm safe on Corbeck. Whoever else is in it,

he is! The things couldn't have been taken without his connivance-if

what he says is true. If it isn't-well! he is a liar anyhow. I would

think it a bad job to have him stay in the house with so many valuables,

only that it will give me and my mate a chance of watching him. we'll

keep a pretty good look-out, too, I tell you. He's up in my room now,

guarding those lamps; but Johnny Wright is there too. I go on before he

comes off; so there won't be much chance of another house-breaking. Of

course, Mr. Ross, all this, too, is between you and me."

"Quite so! You may depend on my silence!" I said; and he went away to

keep a close eye on the Egyptologist.

It seemed as though all my painful experiences were to go in pairs, and

that the sequence of the previous day was to be repeated; for before

long I had another private visit from Doctor Winchester who had now paid

his nightly visit to his patient and was on his way home. He took the

seat which I proffered and began at once:

"This is a strange affair altogether. Miss Trelawny has just been

telling me about the stolen lamps, and of the finding of them in the

Napoleon cabinet. It would seem to be another complication of the

mystery; and yet, do you know, it is a relief to me. I have exhausted

all human and natural possibilities of the case, and am beginning to

fall back on superhuman and supernatural possibilities. Here are such

strange things that, if I am not going mad, I think we must have a

solution before long. I wonder if I might ask some questions and some

help from Mr. Corbeck, without making further complications and

embarrassing us. He seems to know an amazing amount regarding Egypt and

all relating to it. Perhaps he wouldn't mind translating a little bit

of hieroglyphic. It is child's play to him. What do you think?"

When I had thought the matter over a few seconds I spoke. We wanted all

the help we could get. For myself, I had perfect confidence in both

men; and any comparing notes, or mutual assistance, might bring good

results. Such could hardly bring evil.

"By all means I should ask him. He seems an extraordinarily learned man

in Egyptology; and he seems to me a good fellow as well as an

enthusiast. By the way, it will be necessary to be a little guarded as

to whom you speak regarding any information which he may give you."

"Of course!" he answered. "Indeed I should not dream of saying anything

to anybody, excepting yourself. We have to remember that when Mr.

Trelawny recovers he may not like to think that we have been chattering

unduly over his affairs."

"Look here!" I said, "why not stay for a while: and I shall ask him to

come and have a pipe with us. We can then talk over things."

He acquiesced: so I went to the room where Mr. Corbeck was, and brought

him back with me. I thought the detectives were pleased at his going.

On the way to my room he said:

"I don't half like leaving those things there, with only those men to

guard them. They're a deal sight too precious to be left to the police!"

From which it would appear that suspicion was not confined to Sergeant

Daw.

Mr. Corbeck and Doctor Winchester, after a quick glance at each other,

became at once on most friendly terms. The traveller professed his

willingness to be of any assistance which he could, provided, he added,

that it was anything about which he was free to speak. This was not

very promising; but Doctor Winchester began at once:

"I want you, if you will, to translate some hieroglyphic for me."

"Certainly, with the greatest pleasure, so far as I can. For I may tell

you that hieroglyphic writing is not quite mastered yet; though we are

getting at it! We are getting at it! What is the inscription?"

"There are two," he answered. "One of them I shall bring here."

He went out, and returned in a minute with the mummy cat which he had

that evening introduced to Silvio. The scholar took it; and, after a

short examination, said:

"There is nothing especial in this. It is an appeal to Bast, the Lady

of Bubastis, to give her good bread and milk in the Elysian Fields.

There may be more inside; and if you will care to unroll it, I will do

my best. I do not think, however, that there is anything special. From

the method of wrapping I should say it is from the Delta; and of a late

period, when such mummy work was common and cheap. What is the other

inscription you wish me to see?"

"The inscription on the mummy cat in Mr. Trelawny's room."

Mr. Corbeck's face fell. "No!" he said, "I cannot do that! I am, for

the present at all events, practically bound to secrecy regarding any of

the things in Mr. Trelawny's room."

Doctor Winchester's comment and my own were made at the same moment. I

said only the one word “Checkmate!” from which I think he may have

gathered that I guessed more of his idea and purpose than perhaps I had

intentionally conveyed to him. He murmured:

“Practically bound to secrecy?”

Mr. Corbeck at once took up the challenge conveyed:

“Do not misunderstand me! I am not bound by any definite pledge of

secrecy; but I am bound in honour to respect Mr. Trelawny’s confidence,

given to me, I may tell you, in a very large measure. Regarding many of

the objects in his room he has a definite purpose in view; and it would

not be either right or becoming for me, his trusted friend and

confidant, to forestall that purpose. Mr. Trelawny, you may know—or

rather you do not know or you would not have so construed my remark—is

a scholar, a very great scholar. He has worked for years toward a

certain end. For this he has spared no labour, no expense, no personal

danger or self-denial. He is on the line of a result which will place

him amongst the foremost discoverers or investigators of his age. And

now, just at the time when any hour might bring him success, he is

stricken down!”

He stopped, seemingly overcome with emotion. After a time he recovered

himself and went on:

“Again, do not misunderstand me as to another point. I have said that

Mr. Trelawny has made much confidence with me; but I do not mean to lead

you to believe that I know all his plans, or his aims or objects. I

know the period which he has been studying; and the definite historical

individual whose life he has been investigating, and whose records he

has been following up one by one with infinite patience. But beyond

this I know nothing. That he has some aim or object in the completion

of this knowledge I am convinced. What it is I may guess; but I must

say nothing. Please to remember, gentlemen, that I have voluntarily

accepted the position of recipient of a partial confidence. I have

respected that; and I must ask any of my friends to do the same."

He spoke with great dignity; and he grew, moment by moment, in the

respect and esteem of both Doctor Winchester and myself. We understood

that he had not done speaking; so we waited in silence till he

continued:

"I have spoken this much, although I know well that even such a hint as

either of you might gather from my words might jeopardise the success of

his work. But I am convinced that you both wish to help him—and his

daughter," he said this looking me fairly between the eyes, "to the best

of your power, honestly and unselfishly. He is so stricken down, and the manner of it is so mysterious that I cannot but think that it is in some way a result of his own work. That he calculated on some set-back is manifest to us all. God knows! I am willing to do what I can, and to use any knowledge I have in his behalf. I arrived in England full of exultation at the thought that I had fulfilled the mission with which he had trusted me. I had got what he said were the last objects of his search; and I felt assured that he would now be able to begin the experiment of which he had often hinted to me. It is too dreadful that at just such a time such a calamity should have fallen on him. Doctor Winchester, you are a physician; and, if your face does not belie you, you are a clever and a bold one. Is there no way which you can devise to wake this man from his unnatural stupor?”

There was a pause; then the answer came slowly and deliberately:

“There is no ordinary remedy that I know of. There might possibly be

some extraordinary one. But there would be no use in trying to find it,

except on one condition.”

“And that?”

“Knowledge! I am completely ignorant of Egyptian matters, language,

writing, history, secrets, medicines, poisons, occult powers—all that go

to make up the mystery of that mysterious land. This disease, or

condition, or whatever it may be called, from which Mr. Trelawny is

suffering, is in some way connected with Egypt. I have had a suspicion

of this from the first; and later it grew into a certainty, though

without proof. What you have said tonight confirms my conjecture, and

makes me believe that a proof is to be had. I do not think that you

quite know all that has gone on in this house since the night of the

attack—of the finding of Mr. Trelawny’s body. Now I propose that we

confide in you. If Mr. Ross agrees, I shall ask him to tell you. He is more skilled than I am in putting facts before other people. He can speak by his brief; and in this case he has the best of all briefs, the experience of his own eyes and ears, and the evidence that he has himself taken on the spot from participators in, or spectators of, what has happened. When you know all, you will, I hope, be in a position to judge as to whether you can best help Mr. Trelawny, and further his secret wishes, by your silence or your speech."

I nodded approval. Mr. Corbeck jumped up, and in his impulsive way held out a hand to each.

"Done!" he said. "I acknowledge the honour of your confidence; and on my part I pledge myself that if I find my duty to Mr. Trelawny's wishes will, in his own interest, allow my lips to open on his affairs, I shall speak so freely as I may."

Accordingly I began, and told him, as exactly as I could, everything

that had happened from the moment of my waking at the knocking on the

door in Jermyn Street. The only reservations I made were as to my own

feeling toward Miss Trelawny and the matters of small import to the main

subject which followed it; and my conversations with Sergeant Daw, which

were in themselves private, and which would have demanded discretionary

silence in any case. As I spoke, Mr. Corbeck followed with breathless

interest. Sometimes he would stand up and pace about the room in

uncontrollable excitement; and then recover himself suddenly, and sit

down again. Sometimes he would be about to speak, but would, with an

effort, restrain himself. I think the narration helped me to make up my

own mind; for even as I talked, things seemed to appear in a clearer

light. Things big and little, in relation of their importance to the

case, fell into proper perspective. The story up to date became

coherent, except as to its cause, which seemed a greater mystery than

ever. This is the merit of entire, or collected, narrative. Isolated

facts, doubts, suspicions, conjectures, give way to a homogeneity which

is convincing.

That Mr. Corbeck was convinced was evident. He did not go through any

process of explanation or limitation, but spoke right out at once to the

point, and fearlessly like a man:

"That settles me! There is in activity some Force that needs special

care. If we all go on working in the dark we shall get in one another's

way, and by hampering each other, undo the good that any or each of us,

working in different directions, might do. It seems to me that the

first thing we have to accomplish is to get Mr. Trelawny waked out of

that unnatural sleep. That he can be waked is apparent from the way the

Nurse has recovered; though what additional harm may have been done to

him in the time he has been lying in that room I suppose no one can

tell. We must chance that, however. He has lain there, and whatever the effect might be, it is there now; and we have, and shall have, to deal with it as a fact. A day more or less won't hurt in the long-run. It is late now; and we shall probably have tomorrow a task before us that will require our energies afresh. You, Doctor, will want to get to your sleep; for I suppose you have other work as well as this to do tomorrow. As for you, Mr. Ross, I understand that you are to have a spell of watching in the sick-room tonight. I shall get you a book which will help to pass the time for you. I shall go and look for it in the library. I know where it was when I was here last; and I don't suppose Mr. Trelawny has used it since. He knew long ago all that was in it which was or might be of interest to him. But it will be necessary, or at least helpful, to understand other things which I shall tell you later. You will be able to tell Doctor Winchester all that would aid him. For I take it that our work will branch out pretty soon. We shall each have our own end to hold up; and it will take each of us all our time and understanding to get through his own tasks. It will

not be necessary for you to read the whole book. All that will interest

you—with regard to our matter I mean of course, for the whole book is

interesting as a record of travel in a country then quite unknown—is the

preface, and two or three chapters which I shall mark for you."

He shook hands warmly with Doctor Winchester who had stood up to go.

Whilst he was away I sat lonely, thinking. As I thought, the world

around me seemed to be illimitably great. The only little spot in which

I was interested seemed like a tiny speck in the midst of a wilderness.

Without and around it were darkness and unknown danger, pressing in from

every side. And the central figure in our little oasis was one of

sweetness and beauty. A figure one could love; could work for; could

die for … !

Mr. Corbeck came back in a very short time with the book; he had found

it at once in the spot where he had seen it three years before. Having

placed in it several slips of paper, marking the places where I was to

read, he put it into my hands, saying:

"That is what started Mr. Trelawny; what started me when I read it; and

which will, I have no doubt, be to you an interesting beginning to a

special study—whatever the end may be. If, indeed, any of us here may

ever see the end."

At the door he paused and said:

"I want to take back one thing. That Detective is a good fellow. What

you have told me of him puts him in a new light. The best proof of it

is that I can go quietly to sleep tonight, and leave the lamps in his

care!"

When he had gone I took the book with me, put on my respirator, and went

to my spell of duty in the sick-room!

Chapter X

The Valley of the Sorcerer

I placed the book on the little table on which the shaded lamp rested and moved the screen to one side. Thus I could have the light on my book; and by looking up, see the bed, and the Nurse, and the door. I cannot say that the conditions were enjoyable, or calculated to allow of that absorption in the subject which is advisable for effective study. However, I composed myself to the work as well as I could. The book was one which, on the very face of it, required special attention. It was a folio in Dutch, printed in Amsterdam in 1650. Some one had made a literal translation, writing generally the English word under the Dutch, so that the grammatical differences between the two tongues made even the reading of the translation a difficult matter. One had to dodge backward and forward among the words. This was in addition to the difficulty of deciphering a strange handwriting of two hundred years ago. I found, however, that after a short time I got into the habit of

following in conventional English the Dutch construction; and, as I

became more familiar with the writing, my task became easier.

At first the circumstances of the room, and the fear lest Miss Trelawny

should return unexpectedly and find me reading the book, disturbed me

somewhat. For we had arranged amongst us, before Doctor Winchester had

gone home, that she was not to be brought into the range of the coming

investigation. We considered that there might be some shock to a

woman's mind in matters of apparent mystery; and further, that she,

being Mr. Trelawny's daughter, might be placed in a difficult position

with him afterward if she took part in, or even had a personal knowledge

of, the disregarding of his expressed wishes. But when I remembered

that she did not come on nursing duty till two o'clock, the fear of

interruption passed away. I had still nearly three house before me.

Nurse Kennedy sat in her chair by the bedside, patient and alert. A

clock ticked on the landing; other clocks in the house ticked; the life

of the city without manifested itself in the distant hum, now and again

swelling into a roar as a breeze floating westward took the concourse of

sounds with it. But still the dominant idea was of silence. The light

on my book, and the soothing fringe of green silk round the shade

intensified, whenever I looked up, the gloom of the sick-room. With

every line I read, this seemed to grow deeper and deeper; so that when

my eyes came back to the page the light seemed to dazzle me. I stuck to

my work, however, and presently began to get sufficiently into the

subject to become interested in it.

The book was by one Nicholas van Huyn of Hoorn. In the preface he told

how, attracted by the work of John Greaves of Merton College,

Pyramidographia, he himself visited Egypt, where he became so interested

in its wonders that he devoted some years of his life to visiting

strange places, and exploring the ruins of many temples and tombs. He

had come across many variants of the story of the building of the

Pyramids as told by the Arabian historian, Ibn Abd Alhokin, some of which he set down. These I did not stop to read, but went on to the marked pages.

As soon as I began to read these, however, there grew on me some sense of a disturbing influence. Once or twice I looked to see if the Nurse had moved, for there was a feeling as though some one were near me.

Nurse Kennedy sat in her place, as steady and alert as ever; and I came back to my book again.

The narrative went on to tell how, after passing for several days through the mountains to the east of Aswan, the explorer came to a certain place. Here I give his own words, simply putting the translation into modern English:

"Toward evening we came to the entrance of a narrow, deep valley, running east and west. I wished to proceed through this; for the sun,

now nearly down on the horizon, showed a wide opening beyond the narrowing of the cliffs. But the fellaheen absolutely refused to enter the valley at such a time, alleging that they might be caught by the night before they could emerge from the other end. At first they would give no reason for their fear. They had hitherto gone anywhere I wished, and at any time, without demur. On being pressed, however, they said that the place was the Valley of the Sorcerer, where none might come in the night. On being asked to tell of the Sorcerer, they refused, saying that there was no name, and that they knew nothing. On the next morning, however, when the sun was up and shining down the valley, their fears had somewhat passed away. Then they told me that a great Sorcerer in ancient days—'millions of millions of years' was the term they used—a King or a Queen, they could not say which, was buried there. They could not give the name, persisting to the last that there was no name; and that anyone who should name it would waste away in life

so that at death nothing of him would remain to be raised again in the

Other World. In passing through the valley they kept together in a

cluster, hurrying on in front of me. None dared to remain behind. They

gave, as their reason for so proceeding, that the arms of the Sorcerer

were long, and that it was dangerous to be the last. The which was of

little comfort to me who of this necessity took that honourable post.

In the narrowest part of the valley, on the south side, was a great

cliff of rock, rising sheer, of smooth and even surface. Hereon were

graven certain cabalistic signs, and many figures of men and animals,

fishes, reptiles and birds; suns and stars; and many quaint symbols.

Some of these latter were disjointed limbs and features, such as arms

and legs, fingers, eyes, noses, ears, and lips. Mysterious symbols

which will puzzle the Recording Angel to interpret at the Judgment Day.

The cliff faced exactly north. There was something about it so strange,

and so different from the other carved rocks which I had visited, that I

called a halt and spent the day in examining the rock front as well as I

could with my telescope. The Egyptians of my company were terribly

afraid, and used every kind of persuasion to induce me to pass on. I

stayed till late in the afternoon, by which time I had failed to make

out aright the entry of any tomb, for I suspected that such was the

purpose of the sculpture of the rock. By this time the men were

rebellious; and I had to leave the valley if I did not wish my whole

retinue to desert. But I secretly made up my mind to discover the tomb,

and explore it. To this end I went further into the mountains, where I

met with an Arab Sheik who was willing to take service with me. The

Arabs were not bound by the same superstitious fears as the Egyptians;

Sheik Abu Some and his following were willing to take a part in the

explorations.

"When I returned to the valley with these Bedouins, I made effort to

climb the face of the rock, but failed, it being of one impenetrable

smoothness. The stone, generally flat and smooth by nature, had been

chiselled to completeness. That there had been projecting steps was

manifest, for there remained, untouched by the wondrous climate of that

strange land, the marks of saw and chisel and mallet where the steps had

been cut or broken away.

"Being thus baffled of winning the tomb from below, and being unprovided

with ladders to scale, I found a way by much circuitous journeying to

the top of the cliff. Thence I caused myself to be lowered by ropes,

till I had investigated that portion of the rock face wherein I expected

to find the opening. I found that there was an entrance, closed however

by a great stone slab. This was cut in the rock more than a hundred

feet up, being two-thirds the height of the cliff. The hieroglyphic and

cabalistic symbols cut in the rock were so managed as to disguise it.

The cutting was deep, and was continued through the rock and the portals

of the doorway, and through the great slab which formed the door itself.

This was fixed in place with such incredible exactness that no stone

chisel or cutting implement which I had with me could find a lodgment in

the interstices. I used much force, however; and by many heavy strokes

won a way into the tomb, for such I found it to be. The stone door

having fallen into the entrance I passed over it into the tomb, noting

as I went a long iron chain which hung coiled on a bracket close to the

doorway.

"The tomb I found to be complete, after the manner of the finest

Egyptian tombs, with chamber and shaft leading down to the corridor,

ending in the Mummy Pit. It had the table of pictures, which seems some

kind of record—whose meaning is now for ever lost—graven in a wondrous

colour on a wondrous stone.

"All the walls of the chamber and the passage were carved with strange

writings in the uncanny form mentioned. The huge stone coffin or

sarcophagus in the deep pit was marvellously graven throughout with

signs. The Arab chief and two others who ventured into the tomb with

me, and who were evidently used to such grim explorations, managed to

take the cover from the sarcophagus without breaking it. At which they

wondered; for such good fortune, they said, did not usually attend such

efforst. Indeed they seemed not over careful; and did handle the

various furniture of the tomb with such little concern that, only for

its great strength and thickness, even the coffin itself might have been

injured. Which gave me much concern, for it was very beautifully

wrought of rare stone, such as I had no knowledge of. Much I grieved

that it were not possible to carry it away. But time and desert

journeyings forbade such; I could only take with me such small matters

as could be carried on the person.

"Within the sarcophagus was a body, manifestly of a woman, swathed with

many wrappings of linen, as is usual with all mummies. From certain

embroiderings thereon, I gathered that she was of high rank. Across the

breast was one hand, unwrapped. In the mummies which I had seen, the

arms and hands are within the wrappings, and certain adornments of wood,

shaped and painted to resemble arms and hands, lie outside the enwrapped

body.

"But this hand was strange to see, for it was the real hand of her who

lay enwrapped there; the arm projecting from the cerements being of

flesh, seemingly made as like marble in the process of embalming. Arm

and hand were of dusky white, being of the hue of ivory that hath lain

long in air. The skin and the nails were complete and whole, as though

the body had been placed for burial over night. I touched the hand and

moved it, the arm being something flexible as a live arm; though stiff

with long disuse, as are the arms of those faqueers which I have seen in

the Indees. There was, too, an added wonder that on this ancient hand

were no less than seven fingers, the same all being fine and long, and

of great beauty. Sooth to say, it made me shudder and my flesh creep to

touch that hand that had lain there undisturbed for so many thousands of

years, and yet was like unto living flesh. Underneath the hand, as

though guarded by it, lay a huge jewel of ruby; a great stone of

wondrous bigness, for the ruby is in the main a small jewel. This one

was of wondrous colour, being as of fine blood whereon the light

shineth. But its wonder lay not in its size or colour, though these

were, as I have said, of priceless rarity; but in that the light of it

shone from seven stars, each of seven points, as clearly as though the

stars were in reality there imprisoned. When that the hand was lifted,

the sight of that wondrous stone lying there struck me with a shock

almost to momentary paralysis. I stood gazing on it, as did those with

me, as though it were that faded head of the Gorgon Medusa with the

snakes in her hair, whose sight struck into stone those who beheld. So

strong was the feeling that I wanted to hurry away from the place. So,

too, those with me; therefore, taking this rare jewel, together with

certain amulets of strangeness and richness being wrought of

jewel-stones, I made haste to depart. I would have remained longer, and

made further research in the wrappings of the mummy, but that I feared

so to do. For it came to me all at once that I was in a desert place,

with strange men who were with me because they were not over-scrupulous.

That we were in a lone cavern of the dead, an hundred feet above the

ground, where none could find me were ill done to me, nor would any ever

seek. But in secret I determined that I would come again, though with

more secure following. Moreover, was I tempted to seek further, as in

examining the wrappings I saw many things of strange import in that

wondrous tomb; including a casket of eccentric shape made of some strange stone, which methought might have contained other jewels, inasmuch as it had secure lodgment in the great sarcophagus itself. There was in the tomb also another coffer which, though of rare proportion and adornment, was more simply shaped. It was of ironstone of great thickness; but the cover was lightly cemented down with what seemed gum and Paris plaster, as though to insure that no air could penetrate. The Arabs with me so insisted in its opening, thinking that from its thickness much treasure was stored therein, that I consented thereto. But their hope was a false one, as it proved. Within, closely packed, stood four jars finely wrought and carved with various adornments. Of these one was the head of a man, another of a dog, another of a jackal, and another of a hawk. I had before known that such burial urns as these were used to contain the entrails and other organs of the mummied dead; but on opening these, for the fastening of wax, though complete, was thin, and yielded easily, we found that they held but oil. The Bedouins, spilling most of the oil in the process,

groped with their hands in the jars lest treasure should have been there

concealed. But their searching was of no avail; no treasure was there.

I was warned of my danger by seeing in the eyes of the Arabs certain

covetous glances. Whereon, in order to hasten their departure, I

wrought upon those fears of superstition which even in these callous men

were apparent. The chief of the Bedouins ascended from the Pit to give

the signal to those above to raise us; and I, not caring to remain with

the men whom I mistrusted, followed him immediately. The others did not

come at once; from which I feared that they were rifling the tomb afresh

on their own account. I refrained to speak of it, however, lest worse

should befall. At last they came. One of them, who ascended first, in

landing at the top of the cliff lost his foothold and fell below. He

was instantly killed. The other followed, but in safety. The chief came

next, and I came last. Before coming away I pulled into its place

again, as well as I could, the slab of stone that covered the entrance

to the tomb. I wished, if possible, to preserve it for my own

examination should I come again.

"When we all stood on the hill above the cliff, the burning sun that was

bright and full of glory was good to see after the darkness and strange

mystery of the tomb. Even was I glad that the poor Arab who fell down

the cliff and lay dead below, lay in the sunlight and not in that gloomy

cavern. I would fain have gone with my companions to seek him and give

him sepulture of some kind; but the Sheik made light of it, and sent two

of his men to see to it whilst we went on our way.

"That night as we camped, one of the men only returned, saying that a

lion of the desert had killed his companion after that they had buried

the dead man in a deep sand without the valley, and had covered the spot

where he lay with many great rocks, so that jackals or other preying

beasts might not dig him up again as is their wont.

"Later, in the light of the fire round which the men sat or lay, I saw

him exhibit to his fellows something white which they seemed to regard

with special awe and reverence. So I drew near silently, and saw that

it was none other than the white hand of the mummy which had lain

protecting the Jewel in the great sarcophagus. I heard the Bedouin tell

how he had found it on the body of him who had fallen from the cliff.

There was no mistaking it, for there were the seven fingers which I had

noted before. This man must have wrenched it off the dead body whilst

his chief and I were otherwise engaged; and from the awe of the others I

doubted not that he had hoped to use it as an Amulet, or charm. Whereas

if powers it had, they were not for him who had taken it from the dead;

since his death followed hard upon his theft. Already his Amulet had

had an awesome baptism; for the wrist of the dead hand was stained with

red as though it had been dipped in recent blood.

"That night I was in certain fear lest there should be some violence

done to me; for if the poor dead hand was so valued as a charm, what

must be the worth in such wise of the rare Jewel which it had guarded.

Though only the chief knew of it, my doubt was perhaps even greater; for

he could so order matters as to have me at his mercy when he would. I

guarded myself, therefore, with wakefulness so well as I could,

determined that at my earliest opportunity I should leave this party,

and complete my journeying home, first to the Nile bank, and then down

its course to Alexandria; with other guides who knew not what strange

matters I had with me.

"At last there came over me a disposition of sleep, so potent that I

felt it would be resistless. Fearing attack, or that being searched in

my sleep the Bedouin might find the Star Jewel which he had seen me

place with others in my dress, I took it out unobserved and held it in

my hand. It seemed to give back the light of the flickering fire and

the light of the stars—for there was no moon—with equal fidelity; and I

could note that on its reverse it was graven deeply with certain signs

such as I had seen in the tomb. As I sank into the unconsciousness of

sleep, the graven Star Jewel was hidden in the hollow of my clenched

hand.

"I waked out of sleep with the light of the morning sun on my face. I

sat up and looked around me. The fire was out, and the camp was

desolate; save for one figure which lay prone close to me. It was that

of the Arab chief, who lay on his back, dead. His face was almost

black; and his eyes were open, and staring horribly up at the sky, as

though he saw there some dreadful vision. He had evidently been

strangled; for on looking, I found on his throat the red marks where

fingers had pressed. There seemed so many of these marks that I counted

them. There were seven; and all parallel, except the thumb mark, as

though made with one hand. This thrilled me as I thought of the mummy

hand with the seven fingers.

"Even there, in the open desert, it seemed as if there could be

enchantments!

"In my surprise, as I bent over him, I opened my right hand, which up to

now I had held shut with the feeling, instinctive even in sleep, of

keeping safe that which it held. As I did so, the Star Jewel held there

fell out and struck the dead man on the mouth. Mirabile dictu there

came forth at once from the dead mouth a great gush of blood, in which

the red jewel was for the moment lost. I turned the dead man over to

look for it, and found that he lay with his right hand bent under him as

though he had fallen on it; and in it he held a great knife, keen of

point and edge, such as Arabs carry at the belt. It may have been that

he was about to murder me when vengeance came on him, whether from man

or God, or the Gods of Old, I know not. Suffice it, that when I found

my Ruby Jewel, which shone up as a living star from the mess of blood

wherein it lay, I paused not, but fled from the place. I journeyed on

alone through the hot desert, till, by God's grace, I came upon an Arab

tribe camping by a well, who gave me salt. With them I rested till they

had set me on my way.

"I know not what became of the mummy hand, or of those who had it. What

strife, or suspicion, or disaster, or greed went with it I know not; but

some such cause there must have been, since those who had it fled with

it. It doubtless is used as a charm of potence by some desert tribe.

"At the earliest opportunity I made examination of the Star Ruby, as I

wished to try to understand what was graven on it. The symbols—whose

meaning, however, I could not understand—were as follows …”

Twice, whilst I had been reading this engrossing narrative, I had

thought that I had seen across the page streaks of shade, which the

weirdness of the subject had made to seem like the shadow of a hand. On

the first of these occasions I found that the illusion came from the

fringe of green silk around the lamp; but on the second I had looked up,

and my eyes had lit on the mummy hand across the room on which the

starlight was falling under the edge of the blind. It was of little

wonder that I had connected it with such a narrative; for if my eyes

told me truly, here, in this room with me, was the very hand of which

the traveller Van Huyn had written. I looked over at the bed; and it

comforted me to think that the Nurse still sat there, calm and wakeful.

At such a time, with such surrounds, during such a narrative, it was

well to have assurance of the presence of some living person.

I sat looking at the book on the table before me; and so many strange

thoughts crowded on me that my mind began to whirl. It was almost as if

the light on the white fingers in front of me was beginning to have some

hypnotic effect. All at once, all thoughts seemed to stop; and for an

instant the world and time stood still.

There lay a real hand across the book! What was there to so overcome

me, as was the case? I knew the hand that I saw on the book—and loved

it. Margaret Trelawny's hand was a joy to me to see—to touch; and yet

at that moment, coming after other marvellous things, it had a strangely

moving effect on me. It was but momentary, however, and had passed even

before her voice had reached me.

"What disturbs you? What are you staring at the book for? I thought

for an instant that you must have been overcome again!" I jumped up.

"I was reading," I said, "an old book from the library." As I spoke I closed it and put it under my arm. "I shall now put it back, as I understand that your Father wishes all things, especially books, kept in their proper places." My words were intentionally misleading; for I did not wish her to know what I was reading, and thought it best not to wake her curiosity by leaving the book about. I went away, but not to the library; I left the book in my room where I could get it when I had had my sleep in the day. When I returned Nurse Kennedy was ready to go to bed; so Miss Trelawny watched with me in the room. I did not want any book whilst she was present. We sat close together and talked in a whisper whilst the moments flew by. It was with surprise that I noted the edge of the curtains changing from grey to yellow light. What we talked of had nothing to do with the sick man, except in so far that all

which concerned his daughter must ultimately concern him. But it had

nothing to say to Egypt, or mummies, or the dead, or caves, or Bedouin

chiefs. I could well take note in the growing light that Margaret's

hand had not seven fingers, but five; for it lay in mine.

When Doctor Winchester arrived in the morning and had made his visit to

his patient, he came to see me as I sat in the dining-room having a

little meal—breakfast or supper, I hardly knew which it was—before I

went to lie down. Mr. Corbeck came in at the same time; and we resumed

out conversation where we had left it the night before. I told Mr.

Corbeck that I had read the chapter about the finding of the tomb, and

that I thought Doctor Winchester should read it, too. The latter said

that, if he might, he would take it with him; he had that morning to

make a railway journey to Ipswich, and would read it on the train. He

said he would bring it back with him when he came again in the evening.

I went up to my room to bring it down; but I could not find it anywhere.

I had a distinct recollection of having left it on the little table

beside my bed, when I had come up after Miss Trelawny's going on duty

into the sick-room. It was very strange; for the book was not of a kind

that any of the servants would be likely to take. I had to come back

and explain to the others that I could not find it.

When Doctor Winchester had gone, Mr. Corbeck, who seemed to know the

Dutchman's work by heart, talked the whole matter over with me. I told

him that I was interrupted by a change of nurses, just as I had come to

the description of the ring. He smiled as he said:

"So far as that is concerned, you need not be disappointed. Not in Van

Huyn's time, nor for nearly two centuries later, could the meaning of

that engraving have been understood. It was only when the work was

taken up and followed by Young and Champollion, by Birch and Lepsius and

Rosellini and Salvolini, by Mariette Bey and by Wallis Budge and Flinders Petrie and the other scholars of their times that great results ensued, and that the true meaning of hieroglyphic was known.

"Later, I shall explain to you, if Mr. Trelawny does not explain it himself, or if he does not forbid me to, what it means in that particular place. I think it will be better for you to know what followed Van Huyn's narrative; for with the description of the stone, and the account of his bringing it to Holland at the termination of his travels, the episode ends. Ends so far as his book is concerned. The chief thing about the book is that it sets others thinking—and acting. Amongst them were Mr. Trelawny and myself. Mr. Trelawny is a good linguist of the Orient, but he does not know Northern tongues. As for

me I have a faculty for learning languages; and when I was pursuing my

studies in Leyden I leaned Dutch so that I might more easily make references in the library there. Thus it was, that at the very time when Mr. Trelawny, who, in making his great collection of works on

Egypt, had, through a booksellers' catalogue, acquired this volume with

the manuscript translation, was studying it, I was reading another copy,

in original Dutch, in Leyden. We were both struck by the description of

the lonely tomb in the rock; cut so high up as to be inaccessible to

ordinary seekers: with all means of reaching it carefully obliterated;

and yet with such an elaborate ornamentation of the smoothed surface of

the cliff as Van Huyn has described. It also struck us both as an odd

thing—for in the years between Van Huyn's time and our own the general

knowledge of Egyptian curios and records has increased marvellously—that

in the case of such a tomb, made in such a place, and which must have

cost an immense sum of money, there was no seeming record or effigy to

point out who lay within. Moreover, the very name of the place, 'the

Valley of the Sorcerer', had, in a prosaid age, attractions of its own.

When we met, which we did through his seeking the assistance of other

Egyptologists in his work, we talked over this as we did over many other

things; and we determined to make search for the mysterious valley.

Whilst we were waiting to start on the travel, for many things were

required which Mr. Trelawny undertook to see to himself, I went to

Holland to try if I could by any traces verify Van Huyn's narrative. I

went straight to Hoorn, and set patiently to work to find the house of

the traveller and his descendants, if any. I need not trouble you with

details of my seeking—and finding. Hoorn is a place that has not changed

much since Van Huyn's time, except that it has lost the place which it

held amongst commercial cities. Its externals are such as they had been

then; in such a sleepy old place a century or two does not count for

much. I found the house, and discovered that none of the descendants

were alive. I searched records; but only to one end—death and

extinction. Then I set me to work to find what had become of his

treasures; for that such a traveller must have had great treasures was

apparent. I traced a good many to museums in Leyden, Utrecht, and

Amsterdam; and some few to the private houses of rich collectors. At

last, in the shop of an old watchmaker and jeweller at Hoorn, I found

what he considered his chiefest treasure; a great ruby, carven like a

scarab, with seven stars, and engraven with hieroglyphics. The old man

did not know hieroglyphic character, and in his old-world, sleepy life,

the philological discoveries of recent years had not reached him. He

did not know anything of Van Huyn, except that such a person had been,

and that his name was, during two centuries, venerated in the town as a

great traveller. He valued the jewel as only a rare stone, spoiled in

part by the cutting; and though he was at first loth to part with such

an unique gem, he became amenable ultimately to commercial reason. I

had a full purse, since I bought for Mr. Trelawny, who is, as I suppose

you know, immensely wealthy. I was shortly on my way back to London,

with the Star Ruby safe in my pocket-book; and in my heart a joy and

exultation which knew no bounds.

“For here we were with proof of Van Huyn’s wonderful story. The jewel

was put in security in Mr. Trelawny’s great safe; and we started out on

our journey of exploration in full hope.

“Mr. Trelawny was, at the last, loth to leave his young wife whom he

dearly loved; but she, who loved him equally, knew his longing to

prosecute the search. So keeping to herself, as all good women do, all

her anxieties—which in her case were special—she bade him follow out

his bent.”

Chapter XI

A Queen’s Tomb

“Mr. Trelawny’s hope was at least as great as my own. He is not so

volatile a man as I am, prone to ups and downs of hope and despair; but

he has a fixed purpose which crystallises hope into belief. At times I

had feared that there might have been two such stones, or that the

adventures of Van Huyn were traveller’s fictions, based on some ordinary

acquisition of the curio in Alexandria or Cairo, or London or Amsterdam.

But Mr. Trelawny never faltered in his belief. We had many things to

distract our minds from belief or disbelief. This was soon after Arabi

Pasha, and Egypt was so safe place for travellers, especially if they

were English. But Mr. Trelawny is a fearless man; and I almost come to

think at times that I am not a coward myself. We got together a band of

Arabs whom one or other of us had known in former trips to the desert,

and whom we could trust; that is, we did not distrust them as much as

others. We were numerous enough to protect ourselves from chance

marauding bands, and we took with us large impedimenta. We had secured

the consent and passive co-operation of the officials still friendly to

Britain; in the acquiring of which consent I need hardly say that Mr.

Trelawny's riches were of chief importance. We found our way in

dhahabiyehs to Aswan; whence, having got some Arabs from the Sheik and

having given our usual backsheesh, we set out on our journey through the

desert.

"Well, after much wandering and trying every winding in the interminable

jumble of hills, we came at last at nightfall on just such a valley as

Van Huyn had described. A valley with high, steep cliffs; narrowing in

the centre, and widening out to the eastern and western ends. At

daylight we were opposite the cliff and could easily note the opening

high up in the rock, and the hieroglyphic figures which were evidently

intended originally to conceal it.

"But the signs which had baffled Van Huyn and those of his time—and

later, were no secrets to us. The host of scholars who have given their

brains and their lives to this work, had wrested open the mysterious

prison-house of Egyptian language. On the hewn face of the rocky cliff

we, who had learned the secrets, could read what the Theban priesthood

had had there inscribed nearly fifty centuries before.

"For that the external inscription was the work of the priesthood—and a

hostile priesthood at that—there could be no living doubt. The

inscription on the rock, written in hieroglyphic, ran thus:

"'Hither the Gods come not at any summons. The "Nameless One" has

insulted them and is for ever alone. Go not nigh, lest their vengeance

wither you away!'

"The warning must have been a terribly potent one at the time it was

written and for thousands of years afterwards; even when the language in

which it was given had become a dead mystery to the people of the land.

The tradition of such a terror lasts longer than its cause. Even in the

symbols used there was an added significance of alliteration. 'For

ever' is given in the hieroglyphics as 'millions of years'. This symbol

was repeated nine times, in three groups of three; and after each group

a symbol of the Upper World, the Under World, and the Sky. So that for

this Lonely One there could be, through the vengeance of all the Gods,

resurrection in neither the World of Sunlight, in the World of the Dead,

or for the soul in the region of the Gods.

"Neither Mr. Trelawny nor I dared to tell any of our people what the

writing meant. For though they did not believe in the religion whence

the curse came, or in the Gods whose vengeance was threatened, yet they

were so superstitious that they would probably, had they known of it,

have thrown up the whole task and run away.

"Their ignorance, however, and our discretion preserved us. We made an

encampment close at hand, but behind a jutting rock a little further

along the valley, so that they might not have the inscription always

before them. For even that traditional name of the place: 'The Valley

of the Sorcerer', had a fear for them; and for us through them. With

the timber which we had brought, we made a ladder up the face of the

rock. We hung a pulley on a beam fixed to project from the top of the

cliff. We found the great slab of rock, which formed the door, placed

clumsily in its place and secured by a few stones. Its own weight kept

it in safe position. In order to enter, we had to push it in; and we

passed over it. We found the great coil of chain which Van Huyn had

described fastened into the rock. There were, however, abundant

evidences amid the wreckage of the great stone door, which had revolved

on iron hinges at top and bottom, that ample provision had been originally made for closing and fastening it from within.

"Mr. Trelawny and I went alone into the tomb. We had brought plenty of lights with us; and we fixed them as we went along. We wished to get a complete survey at first, and then make examination of all in detail. As we went on, we were filled with ever-increasing wonder and delight. The tomb was one of the most magnificent and beautiful which either of us had ever seen. From the elaborate nature of the sculpture and painting, and the perfection of the workmanship, it was evident that the tomb was prepared during the lifetime of her for whose resting-place it was intended. The drawing of the hieroglyphic pictures was fine, and the colouring superb; and in that high cavern, far away from even the damp of the Nile-flood, all was as fresh as when the artists had laid down their palettes. There was one thing which we could not avoid

seeing. That although the cutting on the outside rock was the work of

the priesthood, the smoothing of the cliff face was probably a part of

the tomb-builder's original design. The symbolism of the painting and

cutting within all gave the same idea. The outer cavern, partly natural

and partly hewn, was regarded architecturally as only an ante-chamber.

At the end of it, so that it would face the east, was a pillared

portico, hewn out of the solid rock. The pillars were massive and were

seven-sided, a thing which we had not come across in any other tomb.

Sculptured on the architrave was the Boat of the Moon, containing

Hathor, cow-headed and bearing the disk and plumes, and the dog-headed

Hapi, the God of the North. It was steered by Harpocrates towards the

north, represented by the Pole Star surrounded by Draco and Ursa Major.

In the latter the stars that form what we call the 'Plough' were cut

larger than any of the other stars; and were filled with gold so that,

in the light of torches, they seemed to flame with a special

significance. Passing within the portico, we found two of the

architectural features of a rock tomb, the Chamber, or Chapel, and the

Pit, all complete as Van Huyn had noticed, though in his day the names

given to these parts by the Egyptians of old were unknown.

"The Stele, or record, which had its place low down on the western wall,

was so remarkable that we examined it minutely, even before going on our

way to find the mummy which was the object of our search. This Stele

was a great slab of lapis lazuli, cut all over with hieroglyphic figures

of small size and of much beauty. The cutting was filled in with some

cement of exceeding fineness, and of the colour of pure vermilion. The

inscription began:

"'Tera, Queen of the Egypts, daughter of Antef, Monarch of the North and

the South.' 'Daughter of the Sun,' 'Queen of the Diadems'.

"It then set out, in full record, the history of her life and reign.

"The signs of sovereignty were given with a truly feminine profusion of

adornment. The united Crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt were, in especial,

cut with exquisite precision. It was new to us both to find the Hejet

and the Desher—the White and the Red crowns of Upper and Lower

Egypt—on the Stele of a queen; for it was a rule, without exception in

the records, that in ancient Egypt either crown was worn only by a king;

though they are to be found on goddesses. Later on we found an

explanation, of which I shall say more presently.

"Such an inscription was in itself a matter so startling as to arrest

attention from anyone anywhere at any time; but you can have no

conception of the effect which it had upon us. Though our eyes were not

the first which had seen it, they were the first which could see it with

understanding since first the slab of rock was fixed in the cliff

opening nearly five thousand years before. To us was given to read this

message from the dead. This message of one who had warred against the

Gods of Old, and claimed to have controlled them at a time when the

hierarchy professed to be the only means of exciting their fears or

gaining their good will.

"The walls of the upper chamber of the Pit and the sarcophagus Chamber

were profusely inscribed; all the inscriptions, except that on the

Stele, being coloured with bluish-green pigment. The effect when seen

sideways as the eye caught the green facets, was that of an old,

discoloured Indian turquoise.

"We descended the Pit by the aid of the tackle we had brought with us.

Trelawny went first. It was a deep pit, more than seventy feet; but it

had never been filled up. The passage at the bottom sloped up to the

sarcophagus Chamber, and was longer than is usually found. It had not

been walled up.

"Within, we found a great sarcophagus of yellow stone. But that I need

not describe; you have seen it in Mr. Trelawny's chamber. The cover of

it lay on the ground; it had not been cemented, and was just as Van Huyn

had described it. Needless to say, we were excited as we looked within.

There must, however, be one sense of disappointment. I could not help

feeling how different must have been the sight which met the Dutch

traveller's eyes when he looked within and found that white hand lying

lifelike above the shrouding mummy cloths. It is true that a part of

the arm was there, white and ivory like.

"But there was a thrill to us which came not to Van Huyn!

"The end of the wrist was covered with dried blood! It was as though

the body had bled after death! The jagged ends of the broken wrist were

rough with the clotted blood; through this the white bone, sticking out,

looked like the matrix of opal. The blood had streamed down and stained

the brown wrappings as with rust. Here, then, was full confirmation of

the narrative. With such evidence of the narrator's truth before us, we

could not doubt the other matters which he had told, such as the blood

on the mummy hand, or marks of the seven fingers on the throat of the

strangled Sheik.

"I shall not trouble you with details of all we saw, or how we learned

all we knew. Part of it was from knowledge common to scholars; part we

read on the Stele in the tomb, and in the sculptures and hieroglyphic

paintings on the walls.

"Queen Tera was of the Eleventh, or Theban Dynasty of Egyptian Kings

which held sway between the twenty-ninth and twenty-fifth centuries

before Christ. She succeeded as the only child of her father, Antef.

She must have been a girl of extraordinary character as well as ability,

for she was but a young girl when her father died. Her youth and sex

encouraged the ambitious priesthood, which had then achieved immense

power. By their wealth and numbers and learning they dominated all

Egypt, more especially the Upper portion. They were then secretly ready

to make an effort for the achievement of their bold and long-considered

design, that of transferring the governing power from a Kingship to a

Hierarchy. But King Antef had suspected some such movement, and had

taken the precaution of securing to his daughter the allegiance of the

army. He had also had her taught statecraft, and had even made her

learned in the lore of the very priests themselves. He had used those of

one cult against the other; each being hopeful of some present gain on

its own part by the influence of the King, or of some ultimate gain from

its own influence over his daughter. Thus, the Princess had been

brought up amongst scribes, and was herself no mean artist. Many of

these things were told on the walls in pictures or in hieroglyphic

writing of great beauty; and we came to the conclusion that not a few of

them had been done by the Princess herself. It was not without cause

that she was inscribed on the Stele as 'Protector of the Arts'.

"But the King had gone to further lengths, and had had his daughter

taught magic, by which she had power over Sleep and Will. This was real

magic—"black" magic; not the magic of the temples, which, I may explain,

was of the harmless or "white" order, and was intended to impress rather

than to effect. She had been an apt pupil; and had gone further than

her teachers. Her power and her resources had given her great

opportunities, of which she had availed herself to the full. She had

won secrets from nature in strange ways; and had even gone to the length

of going down into the tomb herself, having been swathed and coffined

and left as dead for a whole month. The priests had tried to make out

that the real Princess Tera had died in the experiment, and that another

girl had been substituted; but she had conclusively proved their error.

All this was told in pictures of great merit. It was probably in her

time that the impulse was given in the restoring the artistic greatness

of the Fourth Dynasty which had found its perfection in the days of

Chufu.

"In the Chamber of the sarcophagus were pictures and writings to show

that she had achieved victory over Sleep. Indeed, there was everywhere

a symbolism, wonderful even in a land and an age of symbolism.

Prominence was given to the fact that she, though a Queen, claimed all

the privileges of kingship and masculinity. In one place she was

pictured in man's dress, and wearing the White and Red Crowns. In the

following picture she was in female dress, but still wearing the Crowns

of Upper and Lower Egypt, while the discarded male raiment lay at her

feet. In every picture where hope, or aim, of resurrection was

expressed there was the added symbol of the North; and in many places—

always in representations of important events, past, present, or

future—was a grouping of the stars of the Plough. She evidently

regarded this constellation as in some way peculiarly associated with

herself.

"Perhaps the most remarkable statement in the records, both on the STele

and in the mural writings, was that Queen Tera had power to compel the

Gods. This, by the way, was not an isolated belief in Egyptian history;

but was different in its cause. She had engraved on a ruby, carved like

a scarab, and having seven stars of seven points, Master Words to compel

all the Gods, both of the Upper and the Under Worlds.

"In the statement it was plainly set forth that the hatred of the

priests was, she knew, stored up for her, and that they would after her

death try to suppress her name. This was a terrible revenge, I may tell

you, in Egyptian mythology; for without a name no one can after death be

introduced to the Gods, or have prayers said for him. Therefore, she had

intended her resurrection to be after a long time and in a more northern

land, under the constellation whose seven stars had ruled her birth. To

this end, her hand was to be in the air—'unwrapped'—and in it the Jewel

of Seven Stars, so that wherever there was air she might move even as

her Ka could move! This, after thinking it over, Mr. Trelawny and I

agreed meant that her body could become astral at command, and so move,

particle by particle, and become whole again when and where required.

Then there was a piece of writing in which allusion was made to a chest

or casket in which were contained all the Gods, and Will, and Sleep, the

two latter being personified by symbols. The box was mentioned as with

seven sides. It was not much of a surprise to us when, underneath the

feet of the mummy, we found the seven-sided casket, which you have also

seen in Mr. Trelawny's room. On the underneath part of the wrapping—

linen of the left foot was painted, in the same vermilion colour as that

used in the Stele, the hieroglyphic symbol for much water, and

underneath the right foot the symbol of the earth. We made out the

symbolism to be that her body, immortal and transferable at will, ruled

both the land and water, air and fire—the latter being exemplified by

the light of the Jewel Stone, and further by the flint and iron which

lay outside the mummy wrappings.

"As we lifted the casket from the sarcophagus, we noticed on its sides

the strange protuberances which you have already seen; but we were

unable at the time to account for them. There were a few amulets in the

sarcophagus, but none of any special worth or significance. We took it

that if there were such, they were within the wrappings; or more

probably in the strange casket underneath the mummy's feet. This,

however, we could not open. There were signs of there being a cover;

certainly the upper portion and the lower were each in one piece. The

fine line, a little way from the top, appeared to be where the cover was

fixed; but it was made with such exquisite fineness and finish that the

joining could hardly be seen. Certainly the top could not be moved. We

took it, that it was in some way fastened from within. I tell you all

this in order that you may understand things with which you may be in

contact later. You must suspend your judgment entirely. Such strange

things have happened regarding this mummy and all around it, that there

is a necessity for new belief somewhere. It is absolutely impossible to

reconcile certain things which have happened with the ordinary currents

of life or knowledge.

"We stayed around the Valley of the Sorcerer, till we had copied roughly

all the drawings and writings on the walls, ceiling and floor. We took

with us the Stele of lapis lazuli, whose graven record was coloured with

vermilion pigment. We took the sarcophagus and the mummy; the stone

chest with the alabaster jars; the tables of bloodstone and alabaster

and onyx and carnelian; and the ivory pillow whose arch rested on

'buckles', round each of which was twisted an uraeus wrought in gold.

We took all the articles which lay in the Chapel, and the Mummy Pit; the

wooden boats with crews and the ushaptiu figures, and the symbolic

amulets.

"When coming away we took down the ladders, and at a distance buried

them in the sand under a cliff, which we noted so that if necessary we

might find them again. Then with our heavy baggage, we set out on our

laborious journey back to the Nile. It was no easy task, I tell you, to

bring the case with that great sarcophagus over the desert. We had a

rough cart and sufficient men to draw it; but the progress seemed

terribly slow, for we were anxious to get our treasures into a place of

safety. The night was an anxious time with us, for we feared attack

from some marauding band. But more still we feared some of those with

us. They were, after all, but predatory, unscrupulous men; and we had

with us a considerable bulk of precious things. They, or at least the

dangerous ones amongst them, did not know why it was so precious; they

took it for granted that it was material treasure of some kind that we

carried. We had taken the mummy from the sarcophagus, and packed it for

safety of travel in a separate case. During the first night two

attempts were made to steal things from the cart; and two men were found

dead in the morning.

"On the second night there came on a violent storm, one of those

terrible simooms of the desert which makes one feel his helplessness.

We were overwhelmed with drifting sand. Some of our Bedouins had fled

before the storm, hoping to find shelter; the rest of us, wrapped in our

bournous, endured with what patience we could. In the morning, when the

storm had passed, we recovered from under the piles of sand what we

could of our impedimenta. We found the case in which the mummy had been

packed all broken, but the mummy itself could nowhere be found. We

searched everywhere around, and dug up the sand which had piled around

us; but in vain. We did not know what to do, for Trelawny had his heart

set on taking home that mummy. We waited a whole day in hopes that the

Bedouins, who had fled, would return; we had a blind hope that they

might have in some way removed the mummy from the cart, and would

restore it. That night, just before dawn, Mr. Trelawny woke me up and

whispered in my ear:

"'We must go back to the tomb in the Valley of the Sorcerer. Show no

hesitation in the morning when I give the orders! If you ask any

questions as to where we are going it will create suspicion, and will

defeat our purpose."

"'All right!" I answered. "But why shall we go there?' His answer

seemed to thrill through me as though it had struck some chord ready

tuned within:

"'We shall find the mummy there! I am sure of it!' Then anticipating

doubt or argument he added:

"'Wait, and you shall see!' and he sank back into his blanket again.

"The Arabs were surprised when we retraced our steps; and some of them

were not satisfied. There was a good deal of friction, and there were

several desertions; so that it was with a diminished following that we

took our way eastward again. At first the Sheik did not manifest any

curiosity as to our definite destination; but when it became apparent

that we were again making for the Valley of the Sorcerer, he too showed

concern. This grew as we drew near; till finally at the entrance of the

valley he halted and refused to go further. He said he would await our

return if we chose to go on alone. That he would wait three days; but

if by that time we had not returned he would leave. No offer of money

would tempt him to depart from this resolution. The only concession he

would make was that he would find the ladders and bring them near the

cliff. This he did; and then, with the rest of the troop, he went back

to wait at the entrance of the valley.

"Mr. Trelawny and I took ropes and torches, and again ascended to the

tomb. It was evident that someone had been there in our absence, for

the stone slab which protected the entrance to the tomb was lying flat

inside, and a rope was dangling from the cliff summit. Within, there

was another rope hanging into the shaft of the Mummy Pit. We looked at

each other; but neither said a word. We fixed our own rope, and as

arranged Trelawny descended first, I following at once. It was not till

we stood together at the foot of the shaft that the thought flashed

across me that we might be in some sort of a trap; that someone might

descend the rope from the cliff, and by cutting the rope by which we had

lowered ourselves into the Pit, bury us there alive. The thought was

horrifying; but it was too late to do anything. I remained silent. We

both had torches, so that there was ample light as we passed through the

passage and entered the Chamber where the sarcophagus had stood. The

first thing noticeable was the emptiness of the place. Despite all its

magnificent adornment, the tomb was made a desolation by the absence of

the great sarcophagus, to hold which it was hewn in the rock; of the

chest with the alabaster jars; of the tables which had held the

implements and food for the use of the dead, and the ushaptiu figures.

"It was made more infinitely desolate still by the shrouded figure of

the mummy of Queen Tera which lay on the floor where the great

sarcophagus had stood! Beside it lay, in the strange contorted

attitudes of violent death, three of the Arabs who had deserted from our

party. Their faces were black, and their hands and necks were smeared

with blood which had burst from mouth and nose and eyes.

"On the throat of each were the marks, now blackening, of a hand of

seven fingers.

“Trelawny and I drew close, and clutched each other in awe and fear as

we looked.

“For, most wonderful of all, across the breast of the mummied Queen lay

a hand of seven fingers, ivory white, the wrist only showing a scar like

a jagged red line, from which seemed to depend drops of blood.”

Chapter XII

The Magic Coffer

“When we recovered our amazement, which seemed to last unduly long, we

did not lose any time carrying the mummy through the passage, and

hoisting it up the Pit shaft. I went first, to receive it at the top.

As I looked down, I saw Mr. Trelawny lift the severed hand and put it in

his breast, manifestly to save it from being injured or lost. We left

the dead Arabs where they lay. With our ropes we lowered our precious

burden to the ground; and then took it to the entrance of the valley

where our escort was to wait. To our astonishment we found them on the

move. When we remonstrated with the Sheik, he answered that he had

fulfilled his contract to the letter; he had waited the three days as

arranged. I thought that he was lying to cover up his base intention of

deserting us; and I found when we compared notes that Trelawny had the

same suspicion. It was not till we arrived at Cairo that we found he

was correct. It was the 3rd of November 1884 when we entered the Mummy

Pit for the second time; we had reason to remember the date.

"We had lost three whole days of our reckoning—out of our lives—whilst

we had stood wondering in that chamber of the dead. Was it strange,

then, that we had a superstitious feeling with regard to the dead Queen

Tera and all belonging to her? Is it any wonder that it rests with us

now, with a bewildering sense of some power outside ourselves or our

comprehension? Will it be any wonder if it go down to the grave with us

at the appointed time? If, indeed, there be any graves for us who have

robbed the dead!" He was silent for quite a minute before he went on:

"We got to Cairo all right, and from there to Alexandria, where we were

to take ship by the Messagerie service to Marseilles, and go thence by

express to London. But

'The best-laid schemes o' mice and men Gang aft agley.'

At Alexandria, Trelawny found waiting a cable stating that Mrs. Trelawny

had died in giving birth to a daughter.

"Her stricken husband hurried off at once by the Orient Express; and I

had to bring the treasure alone to the desolate house. I got to London

all safe; there seemed to be some special good fortune to our journey.

When I got to this house, the funeral had long been over. The child had

been put out to nurse, and Mr. Trelawny had so far recovered from the

shock of his loss that he had set himself to take up again the broken

threads of his life and his work. That he had had a shock, and a bad

one, was apparent. The sudden grey in his black hair was proof enough

in itself; but in addition, the strong cast of his features had become

set and stern. Since he received that cable in the shipping office at Alexandria I have never seen a happy smile on his face.

"Work is the best thing in such a case; and to his work he devoted himself heart and soul. The strange tragedy of his loss and gain—for the child was born after the mother's death—took place during the time that we stood in that trance in the Mummy Pit of Queen Tera. It seemed to have become in some way associated with his Egyptian studies, and more especially with the mysteries connected with the Queen. He told me very little about his daughter; but that two forces struggled in his mind regarding her was apparent. I could see that he loved, almost idolised her. Yet he could never forget that her birth had cost her mother's life. Also, there was something whose existence seemed to wring his father's heart, though he would never tell me what it was. Again, he once said in a moment of relaxation of his purpose of silence:

"'She is unlike her mother; but in both feature and colour she has a

marvellous resemblance to the pictures of Queen Tera.’

“He said that he had sent her away to people who would care for her as

he could not; and that till she became a woman she should have all the

simple pleasures that a young girl might have, and that were best for

her. I would often have talked with him about her; but he would never

say much. Once he said to me: ‘There are reasons why I should not

speak more than is necessary. Some day you will know—and understand!’

I respected his reticence; and beyond asking after her on my return

after a journey, I have never spoken of her again. I had never seen her

till I did so in your presence.

“Well, when the treasures which we had—ah!—taken from the tomb had

been brought here, Mr. Trelawny arranged their disposition himself. The

mummy, all except the severed hand, he placed in the great ironstone

sarcophagus in the hall. This was wrought for the Theban High Priest

Uni, and is, as you may have remarked, all inscribed with wonderful

invocations to the old Gods of Egypt. The rest of the things from the

tomb he disposed about his own room, as you have seen. Amongst them he

placed, for special reasons of his own, the mummy hand. I think he

regards this as the most sacred of his possessions, with perhaps one

exception. That is the carven ruby which he calls the 'Jewel of Seven

Stars', which he keeps in that great safe which is locked and guarded by

various devices, as you know.

"I dare say you find this tedious; but I have had to explain it, so that

you should understand all up to the present. It was a long time after

my return with the mummy of Queen Tera when Mr. Trelawny re-opened the

subject with me. He had been several times to Egypt, sometimes with me

and sometimes alone; and I had been several trips, on my own account or

for him. But in all that time, nearly sixteen years, he never mentioned

the subject, unless when some pressing occasion suggested, if it did not

necessitate, a reference.

"One morning early he sent for me in a hurry; I was then studying in the

British Museum, and had rooms in Hart Street. When I came, he was all

on fire with excitement. I had not seen him in such a glow since before

the news of his wife's death. He took me at once into his room. The

window blinds were down and the shutters closed; not a ray of daylight

came in. The ordinary lights in the room were not lit, but there were a

lot of powerful electric lamps, fifty candle-power at least, arranged on

one side of the room. The little bloodstone table on which the

heptagonal coffer stands was drawn to the centre of the room. The

coffer looked exquisite in the glare of light which shone on it. It

actually seemed to glow as if lit in some way from within.

"'What do you think of it?' he asked.

"'It is like a jewel,' I answered. 'You may well call it the 'sorcerer's Magic Coffer", if it often looks like that. It almost seems to be alive.'

"'Do you know why it seems so?'

"'From the glare of the light, I suppose?'

"'Light of course,' he answered, 'but it is rather the disposition of light.' As he spoke he turned up the ordinary lights of the room and switched off the special ones. The effect on the stone box was surprising; in a second it lost all its glowing effect. It was still a very beautiful stone, as always; but it was stone and no more.

"'Do you notice anything about the arrangement of the lamps?' he asked.

"'No!'

"'They were in the shape of the stars in the Plough, as the stars are in

the ruby!' The statement came to me with a certain sense of conviction.

I do not know why, except that there had been so many mysterious

associations with the mummy and all belonging to it that any new one

seemed enlightening. I listened as Trelawny went on to explain:

"'For sixteen years I have never ceased to think of that adventure, or

to try to find a clue to the mysteries which came before us; but never

until last night did I seem to find a solution. I think I must have

dreamed of it, for I woke all on fire about it. I jumped out of bed

with a determination of doing something, before I quite knew what it was

that I wished to do. Then, all at once, the purpose was clear before

me. There were allusions in the writing on the walls of the tomb to the

seven stars of the Great Bear that go to make up the Plough; and the

North was again and again emphasized. The same symbols were repeated

with regard to the “Magic Box”, as we called it. We had already noticed

those peculiar translucent spaces in the stone of the box. You remember

the hieroglyphic writing had told that the jewel came from the heart of

an aerolite, and that the coffer was cut from it also. It might be, I

thought, that the light of the seven stars, shining in the right

direction, might have some effect on the box, or something within it. I

raised the blind and looked out. The Plough was high in the heavens, and

both its stars and the Pole Star were straight opposite the window. I

pulled the table with the coffer out into the light, and shifted it

until the translucent patches were in the direction of the stars.

Instantly the box began to glow, as you saw it under the lamps, though

but slightly. I waited and waited; but the sky clouded over, and the

light died away. So I got wires and lamps—you know how often I use them

in experiments—and tried the effect of electric light. It took me some

time to get the lamps properly placed, so that they would correspond to

the parts of the stone, but the moment I got them right the whole thing

began to glow as you have seen it.

"'I could get no further, however. There was evidently something

wanting. All at once it came to me that if light could have some effect

there should be in the tomb some means of producing light, for there

could not be starlight in the Mummy Pit in the cavern. Then the whole

thing seemed to become clear. On the bloodstone table, which has a

hollow carved in its top, into which the bottom of the coffer fits, I

laid the Magic Coffer; and I at once saw that the odd protuberances so

carefully wrought in the substance of the stone corresponded in a way to

the stars in the constellation. These, then, were to hold lights.

"'Eureka!' I cried. 'All we want now is the lamps.'" I tried placing

the electric lights on, or close to, the protuberances. But the glow

never came to the stone. So the conviction grew on me that there were

special lamps made for the purpose. If we could find them, a step on the

road to solving the mystery should be gained.

"'But what about the lamps?' I asked. 'Where are they? When are we to

discover them? How are we to know them if we do find them? What __"

"He stopped me at once:

"'One thing at a time!' he said quietly. 'Your first question contains

all the rest. Where are these lamps? I shall tell you: In the tomb!'

"'In the tomb!' I repeated in surprise. 'Why you and I searched the

place ourselves from end to end; and there was not a sign of a lamp.

Not a sign of anything remaining when we came away the first time; or on

the second, except the bodies of the Arabs.'

"Whilst I was speaking, he had uncoiled some large sheets of paper which

he had brought in his hand from his own room. These he spread out on

the great table, keeping their edges down with books and weights. I

knew them at a glance; they were the careful copies which he had made of

our first transcripts from the writing in the tomb. When he had all

ready, he turned to me and said slowly:

"'Do you remember wondering, when we examined the tomb, at the lack of

one thing which is usually found in such a tomb?'

"'Yes! There was no serdab.'

"The Serdab, I may perhaps explain," said Mr. Corbeck to me, "is a sort

of niche built or hewn in the wall of a tomb. Those which have as yet

been examined bear no inscriptions, and contain only effigies of the

dead for whom the tomb was made." Then he went on with his narrative:

"Trelawny, when he saw that I had caught his meaning, went on speaking

with something of his old enthusiasm:

"'I have come to the conclusion that there must be a serdab—a secret

one. We were dull not to have thought of it before. We might have

known that the maker of such a tomb—a woman, who had shown in other ways

such a sense of beauty and completeness, and who had finished every

detail with a feminine richness of elaboration—would not have neglected

such an architectural feature. Even if it had not its own special

significance in ritual, she would have had it as an adornment. Others

had had it, and she liked her own work to be complete. Depend upon it,

there was—there is—a serdab; and that in it, when it is discovered, we

shall find the lamps. Of course, had we known then what we now know or

at all events surmise, that there were lamps, we might have suspected

some hidden spot, some cachet. I am going to ask you to go out to Egypt

again; to seek the tomb; to find the serdab; and to bring back the

lamps!’”

“‘And if I find there is no serdab; or if discovering it I find no lamps

in it, what then?’ He smiled grimly with that saturnine smile of his, so

rarely seen for years past, as he spoke slowly:

“‘Then you will have to hustle till you find them!’

“‘Good!’ I said. He pointed to one of the sheets.

“‘Here are the transcripts from the Chapel at the south and the east. I

have been looking over the writings again; and I find that in seven

places round this corner are the symbols of the constellation which we

call the Plough, which Queen Tera held to rule her birth and her

destiny. I have examined them carefully, and I notice that they are all

representations of the grouping of the stars, as the constellation appears in different parts of the heavens. They are all astronomically correct; and as in the real sky the Pointers indicate the Pole Star, so these all point to one spot in the wall where usually the serdab is to be found!'

"'Bravo!' I shouted, for such a piece of reasoning demanded applause.

He seemed pleased as he went on:

"'When you are in the tomb, examine this spot. There is probably some spring or mechanical contrivance for opening the receptacle. What it may be, there is no use guessing. You will know what best to do, when you are on the spot.'

"I started the next week for Egypt; and never rested till I stood again in the tomb. I had found some of our old following; and was fairly well

provided with help. The country was now in a condition very different

to that in which it had been sixteen years before; there was no need for

troops or armed men.

"I climbed the rock face alone. There was no difficulty, for in that

fine climate the woodwork of the ladder was still dependable. It was

easy to see that in the years that had elapsed there had been other

visitors to the tomb; and my heart sank within me when I thought that

some of them might by chance have come across the secret place. It

would be a bitter discovery indeed to find that they had forestalled me;

and that my journey had been in vain.

"The bitterness was realised when I lit my torches, and passed between

the seven-sided columns to the Chapel of the tomb.

"There, in the very spot where I had expected to find it, was the

opening of a serdab. And the serdab was empty.

"But the Chapel was not empty; for the dried-up body of a man in Arab

dress lay close under the opening, as though he had been stricken down.

I examined all round the walls to see if Trelawny's surmise was correct;

and I found that in all the positions of the stars as given, the

Pointers of the Plough indicated a spot to the left hand, or south side,

of the opening of the serdab, where was a single star in gold.

"I pressed this, and it gave way. The stone which had marked the front

of the serdab, and which lay back against the wall within, moved

slightly. On further examining the other side of the opening, I found a

similar spot, indicated by other representations of the constellation;

but this was itself a figure of the seven stars, and each was wrought in

burnished gold. I pressed each star in turn; but without result. Then

it struck me that if the opening spring was on the left, this on the

right might have been intended for the simultaneous pressure of all the

stars by one hand of seven fingers. By using both my hands, I managed

to effect this.

"With a loud click, a metal figure seemed to dart from close to the

opening of the serdab; the stone slowly swung back to its place, and

shut with a click. The glimpse which I had of the descending figure

appalled me for the moment. It was like that grim guardian which,

according to the Arabian historian Ibn Abd Alhokin, the builder of the

Pyramids, King Saurid Ibn Salhouk placed in the Western Pyramid to

defend its treasure: 'A marble figure, upright, with lance in hand;

with on his head a serpent wreathed. When any approached, the serpent

would bite him on one side, and twining about his throat and killing

him, would return again to his place.'

"I knew well that such a figure was not wrought to pleasantry; and that

to brave it was no child's play. The dead Arab at my feet was proof of

what could be done! So I examined again along the wall; and found here

and there chippings as if someone had been tapping with a heavy hammer.

This then had been what happened: The grave-robber, more expert at his

work than we had been, and suspecting the presence of a hidden serdab,

had made essay to find it. He had struck the spring by chance; had

released the avenging 'Treasurer', as the Arabian writer designated him.

The issue spoke for itself. I got a piece of wood, and, standing at a

safe distance, pressed with the end of it upon the star.

"Instantly the stone flew back. The hidden figure within darted forward

and thrust out its lance. Then it rose up and disappeared. I thought I

might now safely press on the seven stars; and did so. Again the stone

rolled back; and the 'Treasurer' flashed by to his hidden lair.

"I repeated both experiments several times; with always the same result.

I should have liked to examine the mechanism of that figure of such

malignant mobility; but it was not possible without such tools as could

not easily be had. It might be necessary to cut into a whole section of

the rock. Some day I hope to go back, properly equipped, and attempt

it.

"Perhaps you do not know that the entrance to a serdab is almost always

very narrow; sometimes a hand can hardly be inserted. Two things I

learned from this serdab. The first was that the lamps, if lamps at all

there had been, could not have been of large size; and secondly, that

they would be in some way associated with Hathor, whose symbol, the hawk

in a square with the right top corner forming a smaller square, was cut

in relief on the wall within, and coloured the bright vermilion which we

had found on the Stele. Hathor is the goddess who in Egyptian mythology

answers to Venus of the Greeks, in as far as she is the presiding deity

of beauty and pleasure. In the Egyptian mythology, however, each God

has many forms; and in some aspects Hathor has to do with the idea of

resurrection. There are seven forms or variants of the Goddess; why

should not these correspond in some way to the seven lamps! That there

had been such lamps, I was convinced. The first grave-robber had met

his death; the second had found the contents of the serdab. The first

attempt had been made years since; the state of the body proved this. I

had no clue to the second attempt. It might have been long ago; or it

might have been recently. If, however, others had been to the tomb, it

was probable that the lamps had been taken long ago. Well! all the more

difficult would be my search; for undertaken it must be!

"That was nearly three years ago; and for all that time I have been like

the man in the Arabian Nights, seeking old lamps, not for new, but for

cash. I dared not say what I was looking for, or attempt to give any

description; for such would have defeated my purpose. But I had in my

own mind at the start a vague idea of what I must find. In process of

time this grew more and more clear; till at last I almost overshot my

mark by searching for something which might have been wrong.

"The disappointments I suffered, and the wild-goose chases I made, would

fill a volume; but I persevered. At last, not two months ago, I was

shown by an old dealer in Mossul one lamp such as I had looked for. I

had been tracing it for nearly a year, always suffering disappointment,

but always buoyed up to further endeavour by a growing hope that I was

on the track.

"I do not know how I restrained myself when I realised that, at last, I

was at least close to success. I was skilled, however, in the finesse

of Eastern trade; and the Jew-Arab-Portugee trader met his match. I

wanted to see all his stock before buying; and one by one he produced,

amongst masses of rubbish, seven different lamps. Each of them had a

distinguishing mark; and each and all was some form of the symbol of

Hathor. I think I shook the imperturbability of my swarthy friend by

the magnitude of my purchases; for in order to prevent him guessing what

form of goods I sought, I nearly cleared out his shop. At the end he

nearly wept, and said I had ruined him; for now he had nothing to sell.

He would have torn his hair had he known what price I should ultimately

have given for some of his stock, that perhaps he valued least.

"I parted with most of my merchandise at normal price as I hurried home.

I did not dare to give it away, or even lose it, lest I should incur

suspicion. My burden was far too precious to be risked by any

foolishness now. I got on as fast as it is possible to travel in such

countries; and arrived in London with only the lamps and certain

portable curios and papyri which I had picked up on my travels.

"Now, Mr. Ross, you know all I know; and I leave it to your discretion

how much, if any of it, you will tell Miss Trelawny."

As he finished a clear young voice said behind us:

"What about Miss Trelawny? She is here!"

We turned, startled; and looked at each other inquiringly. Miss

Trelawny stood in the doorway. We did not know how long she had been

present, or how much she had heard.

Chapter XIII

Awaking From the Trance

The first unexpected words may always startle a hearer; but when the

shock is over, the listener's reason has asserted itself, and he can

judge of the manner, as well as of the matter, of speech. Thus it was

on this occasion. With intelligence now alert, I could not doubt of the

simple sincerity of Margaret's next question.

"What have you two men been talking about all this time, Mr. Ross? I

suppose, Mr. Corbeck has been telling you all his adventures in finding

the lamps. I hope you will tell me too, some day, Mr. Corbeck; but that

must not be till my poor Father is better. He would like, I am sure, to

tell me all about these things himself; or to be present when I heard

them." She glanced sharply from one to the other. "Oh, that was what

you were saying as I came in? All right! I shall wait; but I hope it

won’t be long. The continuance of Father’s condition is, I feel,

breaking me down. A little while ago I felt that my nerves were giving

out; so I determined to go out for a walk in the Park. I am sure it

will do me good. I want you, if you will, Mr. Ross, to be with Father

whilst I am away. I shall feel secure then.”

I rose with alacrity, rejoicing that the poor girl was going out, even

for half an hour. She was looking terribly wearied and haggard; and the

sight of her pale cheeks made my heart ache. I went to the sick-room;

and sat down in my usual place. Mrs. Grant was then on duty; we had not

found it necessary to have more than one person in the room during the

day. When I came in, she took occasion to go about some household duty.

The blinds were up, but the north aspect of the room softened the hot

glare of the sunlight without.

I sat for a long time thinking over all that Mr. Corbeck had told me;

and weaving its wonders into the tissue of strange things which had come

to pass since I had entered the house. At times I was inclined to

doubt; to doubt everything and every one; to doubt even the evidences of

my own five senses. The warnings of the skilled detective kept coming

back to my mind. He had put down Mr. Corbeck as a clever liar, and a

confederate of Miss Trelawny. Of Margaret! That settled it! Face to

face with such a proposition as that, doubt vanished. Each time when

her image, her name, the merest thought of her, came before my mind,

each event stood out stark as a living fact. My life upon her faith!

I was recalled from my reverie, which was fast becoming a dream of love,

in a startling manner. A voice came from the bed; a deep, strong,

masterful voice. The first note of it called up like a clarion my eyes

and my ears. The sick man was awake and speaking!

“Who are you? What are you doing here?”

Whatever ideas any of us had ever formed of his waking, I am quite sure

that none of us expected to see him start up all awake and full master

of himself. I was so surprised that I answered almost mechanically:

"Ross is my name. I have been watching by you!" He looked surprised

for an instant, and then I could see that his habit of judging for

himself came into play.

"Watching by me! How do you mean? Why watching by me?" His eye had

now lit on his heavily bandaged wrist. He went on in a different tone;

less aggressive, more genial, as of one accepting facts:

"Are you a doctor?" I felt myself almost smiling as I answered; the

relief from the long pressure of anxiety regarding his life was

beginning to tell:

“No, sir!”

“Then why are you here? If you are not a doctor, what are you?” His tone was again more dictatorial. Thought is quick; the whole train of reasoning on which my answer must be based flooded through my brain before the words could leave my lips. Margaret! I must think of Margaret! This was her father, who as yet knew nothing of me; even of my very existence. He would be naturally curious, if not anxious, to know why I amongst men had been chosen as his daughter’s friend on the occasion of his illness. Fathers are naturally a little jealous in such matters as a daughter’s choice, and in the undeclared state of my love for Margaret I must do nothing which could ultimately embarrass her.

“I am a Barrister. It is not, however, in that capacity I am here; but simply as a friend of your daughter. It was probably her knowledge of my being a lawyer which first determined her to ask me to come when she

thought you had been murdered. Afterwards she was good enough to

consider me to be a friend, and to allow me to remain in accordance with

your expressed wish that someone should remain to watch."

Mr. Trelawny was manifestly a man of quick thought, and of few words.

He gazed at me keenly as I spoke, and his piercing eyes seemed to read

my thought. To my relief he said no more on the subject just then,

seeming to accept my words in simple faith. There was evidently in his

own mind some cause for the acceptance deeper than my own knowledge.

His eyes flashed, and there was an unconscious movement of the mouth—it

could hardly be called a twitch—which betokened satisfaction. He was

following out some train of reasoning in his own mind. Suddenly he

said:

"She thought I had been murdered! Was that last night?"

"No! four days ago." He seemed surprised. Whilst he had been speaking

the first time he had sat up in bed; now he made a movement as though he

would jump out. With an effort, however, he restrained himself; leaning

back on his pillows he said quietly:

"Tell me all about it! All you know! Every detail! Omit nothing! But

stay; first lock the door! I want to know, before I see anyone, exactly

how things stand."

Somehow his last words made my heart leap. "Anyone!" He evidently

accepted me, then, as an exception. In my present state of feeling for

his daughter, this was a comforting thought. I felt exultant as I went

over to the door and softly turned the key. When I came back I found

him sitting up again. He said:

"Go on!"

Accordingly, I told him every detail, even of the slightest which I could remember, of what had happened from the moment of my arrival at the house. Of course I said nothing of my feeling towards Margaret, and spoke only concerning those things already within his own knowledge.

With regard to Corbeck, I simply said that he had brought back some lamps of which he had been in quest. Then I proceeded to tell him fully of their loss, and of their re-discovery in the house.

He listened with a self-control which, under the circumstances, was to me little less than marvellous. It was impassiveness, for at times his eyes would flash or blaze, and the strong fingers of his uninjured hand would grip the sheet, pulling it into far-extending wrinkles. This was most noticeable when I told him of the return of Corbeck, and the

finding of the lamps in the boudoir. At times he spoke, but only a few

words, and as if unconsciously in emotional comment. The mysterious

parts, those which had most puzzled us, seemed to have no special

interest for him; he seemed to know them already. The utmost concern he

showed was when I told him of Daw's shooting. His muttered comment:

'stupid ass!" together with a quick glance across the room at the

injured cabinet, marked the measure of his disgust. As I told him of

his daughter's harrowing anxiety for him, of her unending care and

devotion, of the tender love which she had shown, he seemed much moved.

There was a sort of veiled surprise in his unconscious whisper:

"Margaret! Margaret!"

When I had finished my narration, bringing matters up to the moment when

Miss Trelawny had gone out for her walk—I thought of her as "Miss

Trelawny', not as "Margaret' now, in the presence of her father—he

remained silent for quite a long time. It was probably two or three minutes; but it seemed interminable. All at once he turned and said to me briskly:

"Now tell me all about yourself!" This was something of a floorer; I felt myself grow red-hot. Mr. Trelawny's eyes were upon me; they were now calm and inquiring, but never ceasing in their soul-searching scrutiny. There was just a suspicion of a smile on the mouth which, though it added to my embarrassment, gave me a certain measure of relief. I was, however, face to face with difficulty; and the habit of my life stood me in good stead. I looked him straight in the eyes as I spoke:

"My name, as I told you, is Ross, Malcolm Ross. I am by profession a Barrister. I was made a Q.C. in the last year of the Queen's reign. I have been fairly successful in my work." To my relief he said:

"Yes, I know. I have always heard well of you! Where and when did you

meet Margaret?"

"First at the Hay's in Belgrave Square, ten days ago. Then at a picnic

up the river with Lady Strathconnell. We went from Windsor to Cookham.

Mar—Miss Trelawny was in my boat. I scull a little, and I had my own

boat at Windsor. We had a good deal of conversation—naturally."

"Naturally!" there was just a suspicion of something sardonic in the

tone of acquiescence; but there was no other intimation of his feeling.

I began to think that as I was in the presence of a strong man, I should

show something of my own strength. My friends, and sometimes my

opponents, say that I am a strong man. In my present circumstances, not

to be absolutely truthful would be to be weak. So I stood up to the

difficulty before me; always bearing in mind, however, that my words

might affect Margaret's happiness through her love for her father. I

went on:

"In conversation at a place and time and amid surroundings so pleasing,

and in a solitude inviting to confidence, I got a glimpse of her inner

life. Such a glimpse as a man of my years and experience may get from a

young girl!" The father's face grew graver as I went on; but he said

nothing. I was committed now to a definite line of speech, and went on

with such mastery of my mind as I could exercise. The occasion might be

fraught with serious consequences to me too.

"I could not but see that there was over her spirit a sense of

loneliness which was habitual to her. I thought I understood it; I am

myself an only child. I ventured to encourage her to speak to me

freely; and was happy enough to succeed. A sort of confidence became

established between us." There was something in the father's face which

made me add hurriedly:

“Nothing was said by her, sir, as you can well imagine, which was not right and proper. She only told me in the impulsive way of one longing to give voice to thoughts long carefully concealed, of her yearning to be closer to the father whom she loved; more en rapport with him; more in his confidence; closer within the circle of his sympathies. Oh, believe me, sir, that it was all good! All that a father’s heart could hope or wish for! It was all loyal! That she spoke it to me was perhaps because I was almost a stranger with whom there was no previous barrier to confidence.”

Here I paused. It was hard to go on; and I feared lest I might, in my zeal, do Margaret a disservice. The relief of the strain came from her father.

“And you?”

“Sir, Miss Trelawny is very sweet and beautiful! She is young; and her

mind is like crystal! Her sympathy is a joy! I am not an old man, and

my affections were not engaged. They never had been till then. I hope

I may say as much, even to a father!” My eyes involuntarily dropped.

When I raised them again Mr. Trelawny was still gazing at me keenly.

All the kindliness of his nature seemed to wreath itself in a smile as

he held out his hand and said:

“Malcolm Ross, I have always heard of you as a fearless and honourable

gentleman. I am glad my girl has such a friend! Go on!”

My heart leaped. The first step to the winning of Margaret’s father was

gained. I dare say I was somewhat more effusive in my words and my

manner as I went on. I certainly felt that way.

“One thing we gain as we grow older: to use our age judiciously! I

have had much experience. I have fought for it and worked for it all my

life; and I felt that I was justified in using it. I ventured to ask

Miss Trelawny to count on me as a friend; to let me serve her should

occasion arise. She promised me that she would. I had little idea that

my chance of serving her should come so soon or in such a way; but that

very night you were stricken down. In her desolation and anxiety she

sent for me!" I paused. He continued to look at me as I went on:

"When your letter of instructions was found, I offered my services.

They were accepted, as you know."

"And these days, how did they pass for you?" The question startled me.

There was in it something of Margaret's own voice and manner; something

so greatly resembling her lighter moments that it brought out all the

masculinity in me. I felt more sure of my ground now as I said:

"These days, sir, despite all their harrowing anxiety, despite all the pain they held for the girl whom I grew to love more and more with each passing hour, have been the happiest of my life!" He kept silence for a long time; so long that, as I waited for him to speak, with my heart beating, I began to wonder if my frankness had been too effusive. At last he said:

"I suppose it is hard to say so much vicariously. Her poor mother should have heard you; it would have made her heart glad!" Then a shadow swept across his face; and he went on more hurriedly.

"But are you quite sure of all this?"

"I know my own heart, sir; or, at least, I think I do!"

"No! no!" he answered, "I don't mean you. That is all right! But you spoke of my girl's affection for me … and yet … ! And yet she has been living here, in my house, a whole year… Still, she spoke

to you of her loneliness—her desolation. I never—it grieves me to say

it, but it is true—I never saw sign of such affection towards myself in

all the year! …" His voice trembled away into sad, reminiscent

introspection.

"Then, sir," I said, "I have been privileged to see more in a few days

than you in her whole lifetime!" My words seemed to call him up from

himself; and I thought that it was with pleasure as well as surprise

that he said:

"I had no idea of it. I thought that she was indifferent to me. That

what seemed like the neglect of her youth was revenging itself on me.

That she was cold of heart… . It is a joy unspeakable to me that her

mother's daughter loves me too!" Unconsciously he sank back upon his

pillow, lost in memories of the past.

How he must have loved her mother! It was the love of her mother's

child, rather than the love of his own daughter, that appealed to him.

My heart went out to him in a great wave of sympathy and kindliness. I

began to understand. To understand the passion of these two great,

silent, reserved natures, that successfully concealed the burning hunger

for the other's love! It did not surprise me when presently he murmured

to himself:

"Margaret, my child! Tender, and thoughtful, and strong, and true, and

brave! Like her dear mother! like her dear mother!"

And then to the very depths of my heart I rejoiced that I had spoken so

frankly.

Presently Mr. Trelawny said:

"Four days! The sixteenth! Then this is the twentieth of July?" I

nodded affirmation; he went on:

“So I have been lying in a trance for four days. It is not the first time. I was in a trance once under strange conditions for three days; and never even suspected it till I was told of the lapse of time. I shall tell you all about it some day, if you care to hear.”

That made me thrill with pleasure. That he, Margaret’s father, would so

take me into his confidence made it possible… .The business-like, every-day alertness of his voice as he spoke next quite recalled me:

“I had better get up now. When Margaret comes in, tell her yourself that I am all right. It will avoid any shock! And will you tell Corbeck that I would like to see him as soon as I can. I want to see those lamps, and hear all about them!”

His attitude towards me filled me with delight. There was a possible father-in-law aspect that would have raised me from a death-bed. I was

hurrying away to carry out his wishes; when, however, my hand was on the

key of the door, his voice recalled me:

"Mr. Ross!"

I did not like to hear him say "Mr." After he knew of my friendship

with his daughter he had called me Malcolm Ross; and this obvious return

to formality not only pained, but filled me with apprehension. It must

be something about Margaret. I thought of her as "Margaret" and not as

"Miss Trelawny", now that there was danger of losing her. I know now

what I felt then: that I was determined to fight for her rather than

lose her. I came back, unconsciously holding myself erect. Mr.

Trelawny, the keen observer of men, seemed to read my thought; his face,

which was set in a new anxiety, relaxed as he said:

"Sit down a minute; it is better that we speak now than later. We are

both men, and men of the world. All this about my daughter is very new

to me, and very sudden; and I want to know exactly how and where I

stand. Mind, I am making no objection; but as a father I have duties

which are grave, and may prove to be painful. I—I"—he seemed slightly

at a loss how to begin, and this gave me hope—"I suppose I am to take

it, from what you have said to me of your feelings towards my girl, that

it is in your mind to be a suitor for her hand, later on?" I answered

at once:

"Absolutely! Firm and fixed; it was my intention the evening after I

had been with her on the river, to seek you, of course after a proper

and respectful interval, and to ask you if I might approach her on the

subject. Events forced me into closer relationship more quickly than I

had to hope would be possible; but that first purpose has remained fresh

in my heart, and has grown in intensity, and multiplied itself with

every hour which has passed since then." His face seemed to soften as

he looked at me; the memory of his own youth was coming back to him

instinctively. After a pause he said:

"I suppose I may take it, too, Malcolm Ross"—the return to the

familiarity of address swept through me with a glorious thrill—"that as

yet you have not made any protestation to my daughter?"

"Not in words, sir." The arriere pensee of my phrase struck me, not by

its own humour, but through the grave, kindly smile on the father's

face. There was a pleasant sarcasm in his comment:

"Not in words! That is dangerous! She might have doubted words, or

even disbelieved them."

"I felt myself blushing to the roots of my hair as I went on:

"The duty of delicacy in her defenceless position; my respect for her

father—I did not know you then, sir, as yourself, but only as her

father—restrained me. But even had not these barriers existed, I should

not have dared in the presence of such grief and anxiety to have

declared myself. Mr. Trelawny, I assure you on my word of honour that

your daughter and I are as yet, on her part, but friends and nothing

more!" Once again he held out his hands, and we clasped each other

warmly. Then he said heartily:

"I am satisfied, Malcolm Ross. Of course, I take it that until I have

seen her and have given you permission, you will not make any

declaration to my daughter—in words," he added, with an indulgent smile.

But his face became stern again as he went on:

"Time presses; and I have to think of some matters so urgent and so

strange that I dare not lose an hour. Otherwise I should not have been

prepared to enter, at so short a notice and to so new a friend, on the

subject of my daughter's settlement in life, and of her future

happiness." There was a dignity and a certain proudness in his manner

which impressed me much.

"I shall respect your wishes, sir!" I said as I went back and opened the

door. I heard him lock it behind me.

When I told Mr. Corbeck that Mr. Trelawny had quite recovered, he began

to dance about like a wild man. But he suddenly stopped, and asked me

to be careful not to draw any inferences, at all events at first, when

in the future speaking of the finding of the lamps, or of the first

visits to the tomb. This was in case Mr. Trelawny should speak to me on

the subject; "as, of course, he will," he added, with a sidelong look at

me which meant knowledge of the affairs of my heart. I agreed to this,

feeling that it was quite right. I did not quite understand why; but I

knew that Mr. Trelawny was a peculiar man. In no case could one make a

mistake by being reticent. Reticence is a quality which a strong man

always respects.

The manner in which the others of the house took the news of the

recovery varied much. Mrs. Grant wept with emotion; then she hurried

off to see if she could do anything personally, and to set the house in

order for "Master", as she always called him. The Nurse's face fell:

she was deprived of an interesting case. But the disappointment was

only momentary; and she rejoiced that the trouble was over. She was

ready to come to the patient the moment she should be wanted; but in the

meantime she occupied herself in packing her portmanteau.

I took Sergeant Daw into the study, so that we should be alone when I

told him the news. It surprised even his iron self-control when I told

him the method of the waking. I was myself surprised in turn by his

first words:

"And how did he explain the first attack? He was unconscious when the

second was made.”

Up to that moment the nature of the attack, which was the cause of my

coming to the house, had never even crossed my mind, except when I had

simply narrated the various occurrences in sequence to Mr. Trelawny.

The Detective did not seem to think much of my answer:

“Do you know, it never occurred to me to ask him!” The professional

instinct was strong in the man, and seemed to supersede everything else.

“That is why so few cases are ever followed out,” he said, “unless our

people are in them. Your amateur detective neer hunts down to the

death. As for ordinary people, the moment things begin to mend, and the

strain of suspense is off them, they drop the matter in hand. It is

like sea-sickness,” he added philosophically after a pause; “the moment

you touch the shore you never give it a thought, but run off to the

buffet to feed! Well, Mr. Ross, I'm glad the case is over; for over it is, so far as I am concerned. I suppose that Mr. Trelawny knows his own business; and that now he is well again, he will take it up himself. Perhaps, however, he will not do anything. As he seemed to expect something to happen, but did not ask for protection from the police in any way, I take it that he don't want them to interfere with an eye to punishment. we'll be told officially, I suppose, that it was an accident, or sleep-walking, or something of the kind, to satisfy the conscience of our Record Department; and that will be the end. As for me, I tell you frankly, sir, that it will be the saving of me. I verily believe I was beginning to get dotty over it all. There were too many mysteries, that aren't in my line, for me to be really satisfied as to either facts or the causes of them. Now I'll be able to wash my hands of it, and get back to clean, wholesome, criminal work. Of course, sir, I'll be glad to know if you ever do light on a cause of any kind. And I'll be grateful if you can ever tell me how the man was dragged out of

bed when the cat bit him, and who used the knife the second time. For

master Silvio could never have done it by himself. But there! I keep

thinking of it still. I must look out and keep a check on myself, or I

shall think of it when I have to keep my mind on other things!”

When Margaret returned from her walk, I met her in the hall. She was

still pale and sad; somehow, I had expected to see her radiant after her

walk. The moment she saw me her eyes brightened, and she looked at me

keenly.

“You have some good news for me?” she said. “Is Father better?”

“He is! Why did you think so?”

“I saw it in your face. I must go to him at once.” She was hurrying

away when I stopped her.

“He said he would send for you the moment he was dressed.”

“He said he would send for me!” she repeated in amazement. “Then he is

awake again, and conscious? I had no idea he was so well as that! O

Malcolm!”

She sat down on the nearest chair and began to cry. I felt overcome

myself. The sight of her joy and emotion, the mention of my own name in

such a way and at such a time, the rush of glorious possibilities all

coming together, quite unmanned me. She saw my emotion, and seemed to

understand. She put out her hand. I held it hard, and kissed it. Such

moments as these, the opportunities of lovers, are gifts of the gods! Up

to this instant, though I knew I loved her, and though I believed she

returned my affection, I had had only hope. Now, however, the

self-surrender manifest in her willingness to let me squeeze her hand,

the ardour of her pressure in return, and the glorious flush of love in

her beautiful, deep, dark eyes as she lifted them to mine, were all the

eloquences which the most impatient or exacting lover could expect or

demand.

No word was spoken; none was needed. Even had I not been pledged to

verbal silence, words would have been poor and dull to express what we

felt. Hand in hand, like two little children, we went up the staircase

and waited on the landing, till the summons from Mr. Trelawny should

come.

I whispered in her ear—it was nicer than speaking aloud and at a greater

distance—how her father had awakened, and what he had said; and all

that had passed between us, except when she herself had been the subject

of conversation.

Presently a bell rang from the room. Margaret slipped from me, and looked back with warning finger on lip. She went over to her father's door and knocked softly.

"Come in!" said the strong voice.

"It is I, Father!" The voice was tremulous with love and hope.

There was a quick step inside the room; the door was hurriedly thrown

open, and in an instant Margaret, who had sprung forward, was clasped in

her father's arms. There was little speech; only a few broken phrases.

"Father! Dear, dear Father!"

"My child! Margaret! My dear, dear child!"

"O Father, Father! At last! At last!"

Here the father and daughter went into the room together, and the door

closed.

Chapter XIV

The Birth-Mark

During my waiting for the summons to Mr. Trelawny's room, which I knew

would come, the time was long and lonely. After the first few moments

of emotional happiness at Margaret's joy, I somehow felt apart and

alone; and for a little time the selfishness of a lover possessed me.

But it was not for long. Margaret's happiness was all to me; and in the

conscious sense of it I lost my baser self. Margaret's last words as

the door closed on them gave the key to the whole situation, as it had

been and as it was. These two proud, strong people, though father and

daughter, had only come to know each other when the girl was grown up.

Margaret's nature was of that kind which matures early.

The pride and strength of each, and the reticence which was their

corollary, made a barrier at the beginning. Each had respected the

other's reticence too much thereafter; and the misunderstanding grew to

habit. And so these two loving hearts, each of which yearned for

sympathy from the other, were kept apart. But now all was well, and in

my heart of hearts I rejoiced that at last Margaret was happy. Whilst I

was still musing on the subject, and dreaming dreams of a personal

nature, the door was opened, and Mr. Trelawny beckoned to me.

"Come in, Mr. Ross!" he said cordially, but with a certain formality

which I dreaded. I entered the room, and he closed the door again. He

held out his hand, and I put mine in it. He did not let it go, but

still held it as he drew me over toward his daughter. Margaret looked

from me to him, and back again; and her eyes fell. When I was close to

her, Mr. Trelawny let go my hand, and, looking his daughter straight in

the face, said:

"If things are as I fancy, we shall not have any secrets between us.

Malcolm Ross knows so much of my affairs already, that I take it he must

either let matters stop where they are and go away in silence, or else

he must know more. Margaret! are you willing to let Mr. Ross see your

wrist?”

She threw one swift look of appeal in his eyes; but even as she did so

she seemed to make up her mind. Without a word she raised her right

hand, so that the bracelet of spreading wings which covered the wrist

fell back, leaving the flesh bare. Then an icy chill shot through me.

On her wrist was a thin red jagged line, from which seemed to hang red

stains like drops of blood!

She stood there, a veritable figure of patient pride.

Oh! but she looked proud! Through all her sweetness, all her dignity,

all her high-souled negation of self which I had known, and which never

seemed more marked than now—through all the fire that seemed to shine

from the dark depths of her eyes into my very soul, pride shone

conspicuously. The pride that has faith; the pride that is born of

conscious purity; the pride of a veritable queen of Old Time, when to be

royal was to be the first and greatest and bravest in all high things.

As we stood thus for some seconds, the deep, grave voice of her father

seemed to sound a challenge in my ears:

"What do you say now?"

My answer was not in words. I caught Margaret's right hand in mine as

it fell, and, holding it tight, whilst with the other I pushed back the

golden cincture, stooped and kissed the wrist. As I looked up at her,

but never letting go her hand, there was a look of joy on her face such

as I dream of when I think of heaven. Then I faced her father.

“You have my answer, sir!” His strong face looked gravely sweet. He

only said one word as he laid his hand on our clasped ones, whilst he

bent over and kissed his daughter:

“Good!”

We were interrupted by a knock at the door. In answer to an impatient

“Come in!” from Mr. Trelawny, Mr. Corbeck entered. When he saw us

grouped he would have drawn back; but in an instant Mr. Trelawny had

sprung forth and dragged him forward. As he shook him by both hands, he

seemed a transformed man. All the enthusiasm of his youth, of which Mr.

Corbeck had told us, seemed to have come back to him in an instant.

“So you have got the lamps!” he almost shouted. “My reasoning was right

after all. Come to the library, where we will be alone, and tell me all

about it! And while he does it, Ross," said he, turning to me, "do you,

like a good fellow, get the key from the safe deposit, so that I may

have a look at the lamps!"

Then the three of them, the daughter lovingly holding her father's arm,

went into the library, whilst I hurried off to Chancery Lane.

When I returned with the key, I found them still engaged in the

narrative; but Doctor Winchester, who had arrived soon after I left, was

with them. Mr. Trelawny, on hearing from Margaret of his great

attention and kindness, and how he had, under much pressure to the

contrary, steadfastly obeyed his written wishes, had asked him to remain

and listen. "It will interest you, perhaps," he said, "to learn the end

of the story!"

We all had an early dinner together. We sat after it a good while, and

then Mr. Trelawny said:

"Now, I think we had all better separate and go quietly to bed early.

We may have much to talk about tomorrow; and tonight I want to think."

Doctor Winchester went away, taking, with a courteous forethought, Mr.

Corbeck with him, and leaving me behind. When the others had gone Mr.

Trelawny said:

"I think it will be well if you, too, will go home for tonight. I want

to be quite alone with my daughter; there are many things I wish to

speak of to her, and to her alone. Perhaps, even tomorrow, I will be

able to tell you also of them; but in the meantime there will be less

distraction to us both if we are alone in the house." I quite

understood and sympathised with his feelings; but the experiences of the

last few days were strong on me, and with some hesitation I said:

"But may it not be dangerous? If you knew as we do—" To my surprise

Margaret interrupted me:

"There will be no danger, Malcolm. I shall be with Father!" As she

spoke she clung to him in a protective way. I said no more, but stood

up to go at once. Mr. Trelawny said heartily:

"Come as early as you please, Ross. Come to breakfast. After it, you

and I will want to have a word together." He went out of the room

quietly, leaving us together. I clasped and kissed Margaret's hands,

which she held out to me, and then drew her close to me, and our lips

met for the first time.

I did not sleep much that night. Happiness on the one side of my bed

and Anxiety on the other kept sleep away. But if I had anxious care, I

had also happiness which had not equal in my life—or ever can have. The

night went by so quickly that the dawn seemed to rush on me, not

stealing as is its wont.

Before nine o'clock I was at Kensington. All anxiety seemed to float

away like a cloud as I met Margaret, and saw that already the pallor of

her face had given to the rich bloom which I knew. She told me that her

father had slept well, and that he would be with us soon.

"I do believe," she whispered, "that my dear and thoughtful Father has

kept back on purpose, so that I might meet you first, and alone!"

After breakfast Mr. Trelawny took us into the study, saying as he passed

in:

"I have asked Margaret to come too." When we were seated, he said

gravely:

"I told you last night that we might have something to say to each

other. I dare say that you may have thought that it was about Margaret

and yourself. Isn't that so?"

"I thought so."

"Well, my boy, that is all right. Margaret and I have been talking, and

I know her wishes." He held out his hand. When I wrung it, and had

kissed Margaret, who drew her chair close to mine, so that we could hold

hands as we listened, he went on, but with a certain hesitation—it could

hardly be called nervousness—which was new to me.

"You know a good deal of my hunt after this mummy and her belongings;

and I dare say you have guessed a good deal of my theories. But these

at any rate I shall explain later, concisely and categorically, if it be

necessary. What I want to consult you about now is this: Margaret and

I disagree on one point. I am about to make an experiment; the experiment which is to crown all that I have devoted twenty years of research, and danger, and labour to prepare for. Through it we may learn things that have been hidden from the eyes and the knowledge of men for centuries; for scores of centuries. I do not want my daughter to be present; for I cannot blind myself to the fact that there may be danger in it—great danger, and of an unknown kind. I have, however, already faced very great dangers, and of an unknown kind; and so has that brave scholar who has helped me in the work. As to myself, I am willing to run any risk. For science, and history, and philosophy may benefit; and we may turn one old page of a wisdom unknown in this prosaic age. But for my daughter to run such a risk I am loth. Her young bright life is too precious to throw lightly away; now especially when she is on the very threshold of new happiness. I do not wish to see her life given, as her dear mother's was—"

He broke down for a moment, and covered his eyes with his hands. In an

instant Margaret was beside him, clasping him close, and kissing him,

and comforting him with loving words. Then, standing erect, with one

hand on his head, she said:

"Father! mother did not bid you stay beside her, even when you wanted to

go on that journey of unknown danger to Egypt; though that country was

then upset from end to end with war and the dangers that follow war.

You have told me how she left you free to go as you wished; though that

she thought of danger for you and and feared it for you, is proved by

this!" She held up her wrist with the scar that seemed to run blood.

"Now, mother's daughter does as mother would have done herself!" Then

she turned to me:

“Malcolm, you know I love you! But love is trust; and you must trust me

in danger as well as in joy. You and I must stand beside Father in this

unknown peril. Together we shall come through it; or together we shall

fail; together we shall die. That is my wish; my first wish to my

husband that is to be! Do you not think that, as a daughter, I am

right? Tell my Father what you think!”

She looked like a Queen stooping to plead. My love for her grew and

grew. I stood up beside her; and took her hand and said:

“Mr. Trelawny! in this Margaret and I are one!”

He took both our hands and held them hard. Presently he said with deep

emotion:

“It is as her mother would have done!”

Mr. Corbeck and Doctor Winchester came exactly at the time appointed,

and joined us in the library. Despite my great happiness I felt our

meeting to be a very solemn function. For I could never forget the

strange things that had been; and the idea of the strange things which

might be, was with me like a cloud, pressing down on us all. From the

gravity of my companions I gathered that each of them also was ruled by

some such dominating thought.

Instinctively we gathered our chairs into a circle round Mr. Trelawny,

who had taken the great armchair near the window. Margaret sat by him

on his right, and I was next to her. Mr. Corbeck was on his left, with

Doctor Winchester on the other side. After a few seconds of silence Mr.

Trelawny said to Mr. Corbeck:

"You have told Doctor Winchester all up to the present, as we arranged?

"Yes," he answered; so Mr. Trelawny said:

"And I have told Margaret, so we all know!" Then, turning to the Doctor, he asked:

"And am I to take it that you, knowing all as we know it who have followed the matter for years, wish to share in the experiment which we hope to make?" His answer was direct and uncompromising:

"Certainly! Why, when this matter was fresh to me, I offered to go on with it to the end. Now that it is of such strange interest, I would not miss it for anything which you could name. Be quite easy in your mind, Mr. Trelawny. I am a scientist and an investigator of phenomena. I have no one belonging to me or dependent on me. I am quite alone, and free to do what I like with my own—including my life!" Mr. Trelawny bowed gravely, and turning to Mr. Corbeck said:

"I have known your ideas for many years past, old friend; so I need ask

you nothing. As to Margaret and Malcolm Ross, they have already told me

their wishes in no uncertain way." He paused a few seconds, as though

to put his thoughts or his words in order; then he began to explain his

views and intentions. He spoke very carefully, seeming always to bear

in mind that some of us who listened were ignorant of the very root and

nature of some things touched upon, and explaining them to us as he went

on:

"The experiment which is before us is to try whether or no there is any

force, any reality, in the old Magic. There could not possibly be more

favourable conditions for the test; and it is my own desire to do all

that is possible to make the original design effective. That there is

some such existing power I firmly believe. It might not be possible to

create, or arrange, or organise such a power in our own time; but I take

it that if in Old Time such a power existed, it may have some

exceptional survival. After all, the Bible is not a myth; and we read

there that the sun stood still at a man's command, and that an ass—not

a human one—spoke. And if the Witch at Endor could call up to Saul the

spirit of Samuel, why may not there have been others with equal powers;

and why may not one among them survive? Indeed, we are told in the Book

of Samuel that the Witch of Endor was only one of many, and her being

consulted by Saul was a matter of chance. He only sought one among the

many whom he had driven out of Israel; 'all those that had Familiar

Spirits, and the Wizards.' This Egyptian Queen, Tera, who reigned

nearly two thousand years before Saul, had a Familiar, and was a Wizard

too. See how the priests of her time, and those after it tried to wipe

out her name from the face of the earth, and put a curse over the very

door of her tomb so that none might ever discover the lost name. Ay,

and they succeeded so well that even Manetho, the historian of the

Egyptian Kings, writing in the tenth century before Christ, with all the

lore of the priesthood for forty centuries behind him, and with

possibility of access to every existing record, could not even find her

name. Did it strike any of you, in thinking of the late events, who or

what her Familiar was?" There was an interruption, for Doctor

Winchester struck one hand loudly on the other as he ejaculated:

"The cat! The mummy cat! I knew it!" Mr. Trelawny smiled over at him.

"You are right! There is every indication that the Familiar of the

Wizard Queen was that cat which was mummied when she was, and was not

only placed in her tomb, but was laid in the sarcophagus with her. That

was what bit into my wrist, what cut me with sharp claws." He paused.

Margaret's comment was a purely girlish one:

“Then my poor Silvio is acquitted! I am glad!” Her father stroked her hair and went on:

“This woman seems to have had an extraordinary foresight. Foresight far, far beyond her age and the philosophy of her time. She seems to have seen through the weakness of her own religion, and even prepared for emergence into a different world. All her aspirations were for the North, the point of the compass whence blew the cool invigorating breezes that make life a joy. From the first, her eyes seem to have been attracted to the seven stars of the Plough from the fact, as recorded in the hieroglyphics in her tomb, that at her birth a great aerolite fell, from whose heart was finally extracted that Jewel of Seven Stars which she regarded as the talisman of her life. It seems to have so far ruled her destiny that all her thought and care circled round it. The Magic Coffer, so wondrously wrought with seven sides, we learn from the same source, came from the aerolite. Seven was to her a

magic number; and no wonder. With seven fingers on one hand, and seven

toes on one foot. With a talisman of a rare ruby with seven stars in

the same position as in that constellation which ruled her birth, each

star of the seven having seven points—in itself a geological wonder —it

would have been odd if she had not been attracted by it. Again, she was

born, we learn in the Stele of her tomb, in the seventh month of the

year—the month beginning with the Inundation of the Nile. Of which

month the presiding Goddess was Hathor, the Goddess of her own house, of

the Antefs of the Theban line—the Goddess who in various forms

symbolises beauty, and pleasure, and resurrection. Again, in this

seventh month—which, by later Egyptian astronomy began on Octorber 28th,

and ran to the 27th of our November—on the seventh day the Pointer of

the Plough just rises above the horizon of the sky at Thebes.

"In a marvellously strange way, therefore, are grouped into this woman's

life these various things. The number seven; the Pole Star, with the

constellation of seven stars; the God of the month, Hathor, who was her

own particular God, the God of her family, the Antefs of the Theban

Dynasty, whose Kings" symbol it was, and whose seven forms ruled love

and the delights of life and resurrection. If ever there was ground for

magic; for the power of symbolism carried into mystic use; for a belief

in finites spirits in an age which knew not the Living God, it is here.

"Remember, too, that this woman was skilled in all the science of her

time. Her wise and cautious father took care of that, knowing that by

her own wisdom she must ultimately combat the intrigues of the

Hierarchy. Bear in mind that in old Egypt the science of Astronomy

began and was developed to an extraordinary height; and that Astrology

followed Astronomy in its progress. And it is possible that in the

later developments of science with regard to light rays, we may yet find

that Astrology is on a scientific basis. Our next wave of scientific

thought may deal with this. I shall have something special to call your

minds to on this point presently. Bear in mind also that the Egyptians knew sciences, of which today, despite all our advantages, we are profoundly ignorant. Acoustics, for instance, an exact science with the builders of the temples of Karnak, of Luxor, of the Pyramids, is today a mystery to Bell, and Kelvin, and Edison, and Marconi. Again, these old miracle-workers probably understood some practical way of using other forces, and amongst them the forces of light that at present we do not dream of. But of this matter I shall speak later. That Magic Coffer of Queen Tera is probably a magic box in more ways than one. It may—possibly it does—contain forces that we wot not of. We cannot open it; it must be closed from within. How then was it closed? It is a coffer of solid stone, of amazing hardness, more like a jewel than an ordinary marble, with a lid equally solid; and yet all is so finely wrought that the finest tool made today cannot be inserted under the flange. How was it wrought to such perfection? How was the stone so

chosen that those translucent patches match the relations of the seven

stars of the constellation? How is it, or from what cause, that when

the starlight shines on it, it glows from within—that when I fix the

lamps in similar form the glow grows greater still; and yet the box is

irresponsive to ordinary light however great? I tell you that that box

hides some great mystery of science. We shall find that the light will

open it in some way: either by striking on some substance, sensitive in

a peculiar way to its effect, or in releasing some greater power. I

only trust that in our ignorance we may not so bungle things as to do

harm to its mechanism; and so deprive the knowledge of our time of a

lesson handed down, as by a miracle, through nearly five thousand years.

"In another way, too, there may be hidden in that box secrets which, for

good or ill, may enlighten the world. We know from their records, and

inferentially also, that the Egyptians studied the properties of herbs

and minerals for magic purposes—white magic as well as black. We know

that some of the wizards of old could induce from sleep dreams of any

given kind. That this purpose was mainly effected by hypnotism, which

was another art or science of Old Nile, I have little doubt. But still,

they must have had a mastery of drugs that is far beyond anything we

know. With our own pharmacopoeia we can, to a certain extent, induce

dreams. We may even differentiate between good and bad-dreams of

pleasure, or disturbing and harrowing dreams. But these old

practitioners seemed to have been able to command at will any form or

colour of dreaming; could work round any given subject or thought in

almost any was required. In that coffer, which you have seen, may rest

a very armoury of dreams. Indeed, some of the forces that lie within it

may have been already used in my household." Again there was an

interruption from Doctor Winchester.

"But if in your case some of these imprisoned forces were used, what set

them free at the opportune time, or how? Besides, you and Mr. Corbeck

were once before put into a trance for three whole days, when you were

in the Queen's tomb for the second time. And then, as I gathered from

Mr. Corbeck's story, the coffer was not back in the tomb, though the

mummy was. Surely in both these cases there must have been some active

intelligence awake, and with some other power to wield." Mr. Trelawny's

answer was equally to the point:

"There was some active intelligence awake. I am convinced of it. And

it wielded a power which it never lacks. I believe that on both those

occasions hypnotism was the power wielded."

"And wherein is that power contained? What view do you hold on the

subject?" Doctor Winchester's voice vibrated with the intensity of his excitement as he leaned forward, breathing hard, and with eyes staring.

Mr. Trelawny said solemnly:

"In the mummy of the Queen Tera! I was coming to that presently. Perhaps we had better wait till I clear the ground a little. What I hold is, that the preparation of that box was made for a special occasion; as indeed were all the preparations of the tomb and all belonging to it. Queen Tera did not trouble herself to guard against snakes and scorpions, in that rocky tomb cut in the sheer cliff face a hundred feet above the level of the valley, and fifty down from the summit. Her precautions were against the disturbances of human hands;

against the jealousy and hatred of the priests, who, had they known of

her real aims, would have tried to baffle them. From her point of view,

she made all ready for the time of resurrection, whenever that might be.

I gather from the symbolic pictures in the tomb that she so far differed

from the belief of her time that she looked for a resurrection in the

flesh. It was doubtless this that intensified the hatred of the

priesthood, and gave them an acceptable cause for obliterating the very

existence, present and future, of one who had outrage their theories and

blasphemed their gods. All that she might require, either in the

accomplishment of the resurrection or after it, were contained in that

almost hermetically sealed suite of chambers in the rock. In the great

sarcophagus, which as you know is of a size quite unusual even for

kings, was the mummy of her Familiar, the cat, which from its great size

I take to be a sort of tiger-cat. In the tomb, also in a strong

receptacle, were the canopic jars usually containing those internal

organs which are separately embalmed, but which in this case had no such

contents. So that, I take it, there was in her case a departure in

embalming; and that the organs were restored to the body, each in its

proper place—if, indeed, they had ever been removed. If this surmise be

true, we shall find that the brain of the Queen either was never

extracted in the usual way, or, if so taken out, that it was duly

replaced, instead of being enclosed within the mummy wrappings.

Finally, in the sarcophagus there was the Magic Coffer on which her feet

rested. Mark you also, the care taken in the preservance of her power

to control the elements. According to her belief, the open hand outside

the wrappings controlled the Air, and the strange Jewel Stone with the

shining stars controlled Fire. The symbolism inscribed on the soles of

her feet gave sway over Land and Water. About the Star Stone I shall

tell you later; but whilst we are speaking of the sarcophagus, mark how

she guarded her secret in case of grave-wrecking or intrusion. None

could open her Magic Coffer without the lamps, for we know now that

ordinary light will not be effective. The great lid of the sarcophagus

was not sealed down as usual, because she wished to control the air. But

she hid the lamps, which in structure belong to the Magic Coffer, in a

place where none could find them, except by following the secret

guidance which she had prepared for only the eyes of wisdom. And even

here she had guarded against chance discovery, by preparing a bolt of

death for the unwary discoverer. To do this she had applied the lesson

of the tradition of the avenging guard of the treasures of the pyramid,

built by her great predecessor of the Fourth Dynasty of the throne of

Egypt.

"You have noted, I suppose, how there were, in the case of her tomb,

certain deviations from the usual rules. For instance, the shaft of the

Mummy Pit, which is usually filled up solid with stones and rubbish, was

left open. Why was this? I take it that she had made arrangements for

leaving the tomb when, after her resurrection, she should be a new

woman, with a different personality, and less inured to the hardships

that in her first existence she had suffered. So far as we can judge of

her intent, all things needful for her exit into the world had been thought of, even to the iron chain, described by Van Huyn, close to the door in the rock, by which she might be able to lower herself to the ground. That she expected a long period to elapse was shown in the choice of material. An ordinary rope would be rendered weaker or unsafe in process of time, but she imagined, and rightly, that the iron would endure.

"What her intentions were when once she trod the open earth afresh we do not know, and we never shall, unless her own dead lips can soften and speak."

Chapter XV

The Purpose of Queen Tera

"Now, as to the Star Jewel! This she manifestly regarded as the

greatest of her treasures. On it she had engraven words which none of

her time dared to speak.

"In the old Egyptian belief it was held that there were words, which, if

used properly—for the method of speaking them was as important as the

words themselves—could command the Lords of the Upper and the Lower

Worlds. The 'hekau', or word of power, was all-important in certain

ritual. On the Jewel of Seven Stars, which, as you know, is carved into

the image of a scarab, are graven in hieroglyphic two such hekau, one

above, the other underneath. But you will understand better when you

see it! Wait here! Do not stir!"

As he spoke, he rose and left the room. A great fear for him came over

me; but I was in some strange way relieved when I looked at Margaret.

Whenever there had been any possibility of danger to her father, she had

shown great fear for him; now she was calm and placid. I said nothing,

but waited.

In two or three minutes, Mr. Trelawny returned. He held in his hand a

little golden box. This, as he resumed his seat, he placed before him

on the table. We all leaned forward as he opened it.

On a lining of white satin lay a wondrous ruby of immense size, almost

as big as the top joint of Margaret's little finger. It was carven—it

could not possibly have been its natural shape, but jewels do not show

the working of the tool—into the shape of a scarab, with its wings

folded, and its legs and feelers pressed back to its sides. Shining

through its wondrous "pigeon's blood" colour were seven different stars,

each of seven points, in such position that they reproduced exactly the

figure of the Plough. There could be no possible mistake as to this in

the mind of anyone who had ever noted the constellation. On it were

some hieroglyphic figures, cut with the most exquisite precision, as I

could see when it came to my turn to use the magnifying-glass, which Mr.

Trelawny took from his pocket and handed to us.

When we all had seen it fully, Mr. Trelawny turned it over so that it

rested on its back in a cavity made to hold it in the upper half of the

box. The reverse was no less wonderful than the upper, being carved to

resemble the under side of the beetle. It, too, had some hieroglyphic

figures cut on it. Mr. Trelawny resumed his lecture as we all sat with

our heads close to this wonderful jewel:

"As you see, there are two words, one on the top, the other underneath.

The symbols on the top represent a single word, composed of one syllable

prolonged, with its determinatives. You know, all of you, I suppose,

that the Egyptian language was phonetic, and that the hieroglyphic

symbol represented the sound. The first symbol here, the hoe, means

'mer', and the two pointed ellipses the prolongation of the final r:

mer-r-r. The sitting figure with the hand to its face is what we call

the 'determinative' of 'thought'; and the roll of papyrus that of

'abstraction'. Thus we get the word 'mer', love, in its abstract,

general, and fullest sense. This is the hekau which can command the

Upper World."

Margaret's face was a glory as she said in a deep, low, ringing tone:

"Oh, but it is true. How the old wonder-workers guessed at almighty

Truth!" Then a hot blush swept her face, and her eyes fell. Her father

smiled at her lovingly as he resumed:

"The symbolisation of the word on the reverse is simpler, though the

meaning is more abstruse. The first symbol means ‘men’, ‘abiding’, and

the second, ‘ab’, ‘the heart’. So that we get ‘abiding of heart’, or in

our own language ‘patience’. And this is the hekau to control the Lower

World!”

He closed the box, and motioning us to remain as we were, he went back

to his room to replace the Jewel in the safe. When he had returned and

resumed his seat, he went on:

“That Jewel, with its mystic words, and which Queen Tera held under her

hand in the sarcophagus, was to be an important factor—probably the most

important—in the working out of the act of her resurrection. From the

first I seemed by a sort of instinct to realise this. I kept the Jewel

within my great safe, whence none could extract it; not even Queen Tera

herself with her astral body."

"Her 'astral body'? What is that, Father? What does that mean?"

There was a keenness in Margaret's voice as she asked the question which

surprised me a little; but Trelawny smiled a sort of indulgent parental

smile, which came through his grim solemnity like sunshine through a

rifted cloud, as he spoke:

"The astral body, which is a part of Buddhist belief, long subsequent to

the time I speak of, and which is an accepted fact of modern mysticism,

had its rise in Ancient Egypt; at least, so far as we know. It is that

the gifted individual can at will, quick as thought itself, transfer his

body whithersoever he chooses, by the dissolution and reincarnation of

particles. In the ancient belief there were several parts of a human

being. You may as well know them; so that you will understand matters

relative to them or dependent on them as they occur.

"First there is the 'Ka', or 'Double', which, as Doctor Budge explains, may be defined as 'an abstract individuality of personality' which was imbued with all the characteristic attributes of the individual it represented, and possessed an absolutely independent existence. It was free to move from place to place on earth at will; and it could enter into heaven and hold converse with the gods. Then there was the 'Ba', or 'soul', which dwelt in the 'Ka', and had the power of becoming corporeal or incorporeal at will; 'it had both substance and form… . It had power to leave the tomb …It could revisit the body in the tomb … and could reincarnate it and hold converse with it.' Again there was the 'Khu', the 'spiritual intelligence', or spirit. It took the form of 'a shining, luminous, intangible shape of the body.'… Then, again, there was the 'Sekhem', or 'power' of a man, his strength or vital force personified. These were the 'Khaibit', or 'shadow', the 'Ren', or 'name', the 'Khat', or 'physical body', and 'Ab', the 'heart', in which life was seated, went to the full making up of a man.

"Thus you will see, that if this division of functions, spiritual and

bodily, ethereal and corporeal, ideal and actual, be accepted as exact,

there are all the possibilities and capabilities of corporeal

transference, guided always by an unimprisonable will or intelligence."

As he paused I murmured the lines from Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound":

> "'The Magnus Zoroaster … Met his own image walking in the
>
> garden.'"

Mr. Trelawny was not displeased. "Quite so!" he said, in his quiet way.

"Shelley had a better conception of ancient beliefs than any of our

poets." With a voice changed again he resumed his lecture, for so it

was to some of us:

"There is another belief of the ancient Egyptian which you must bear in

mind; that regarding the ushaptiu figures of Osiris, which were placed

with the dead to its work in the Under World. The enlargement of this

idea came to a belief that it was possible to transmit, by magical

formulae, the soul and qualities of any living creature to a figure made

in its image. This would give a terrible extension of power to one who

held the gift of magic.

"It is from a union of these various beliefs, and their natural

corollaries, that I have come to the conclusion that Queen Tera expected

to be able to effect her own resurrection, when, and where, and how, she

would. That she may have held before her a definite time for making her

effort is not only possible but likely. I shall not stop now to explain

it, but shall enter upon the subject later on. With a soul with the

Gods, a spirit which could wander the earth at will, and a power of

corporeal transference, or an astral body, there need be no bounds or

limits to her ambition. The belief is forced upon us that for these

forty or fifty centuries she lay dormant in her tomb-waiting. Waiting

with that ‘patience’ which could rule the Gods of the Under World, for

that ‘love’ which could command those of the Upper World. What she may

have dreamt we know not; but her dream must have been broken when the

Dutch explorer entered her sculptured cavern, and his follower violated

the sacred privacy of her tomb by his rude outrage in the theft of her

hand.

“That theft, with all that followed, proved to us one thing, however:

that each part of her body, though separated from the rest, can be a

central point or rallying place for the items or particles of her astral

body. That hand in my room could ensure her instantaneous presence in

the flesh, and its equally rapid dissolution.

“Now comes the crown of my argument. The purpose of the attack on me

was to get the safe open, so that the sacred Jewel of Seven Stars could

be extracted. That immense door of the safe could not keep out her

astral body, which, or any part of it, could gather itself as well

within as without the safe. And I doubt not that in the darkness of the

night that mummied hand sought often the Talisman Jewel, and drew new

inspiration from its touch. But despite all its power, the astral body

could not remove the Jewel through the chinks of the safe. The Ruby is

not astral; and it could only be moved in the ordinary way by the

opening of the doors. To this end, the Queen used her astral body and

the fierce force of her Familiar, to bring to the keyhole of the safe

the master key which debarred her wish. For years I have suspected,

nay, have believed as much; and I, too, guarded myself against powers of

the Nether World. I, too, waited in patience till I should have

gathered together all the factors required for the opening of the Magic

Coffer and the resurrection of the mummied Queen!" He paused, and his

daughter's voice came out sweet and clear, and full of intense feeling:

"Father, in the Egyptian belief, was the power of resurrection of a mummied body a general one, or was it limited? That is: could it achieve resurrection many times in the course of ages; or only once, and that one final?"

"There was but one resurrection," he answered. "There were some who believed that this was to be a definite resurrection of the body into the real world. But in the common belief, the Spirit found joy in the Elysian Fields, where there was plenty of food and no fear of famine. Where there was moisture and deep-rooted reeds, and all the joys that are to be expected by the people of an arid land and burning clime."

Then Margaret spoke with an earnestness which showed the conviction of her inmost soul:

“To me, then, it is given to understand what was the dream of this great

and far-thinking and high-souled lady of old; the dream that held her

soul in patient waiting for its realisation through the passing of all

those tens of centuries. The dream of a love that might be; a love that

she felt she might, even under new conditions, herself evoke. The love

that is the dream of every woman’s life; of the Old and of the New;

Pagan or Christian; under whatever sun; in whatever rank or calling;

however may have been the joy or pain of her life in other ways. Oh! I

know it! I know it! I am a woman, and I know a woman’s heart. What

were the lack of food or the plenitude of it; what were feast or famine

to this woman, born in a palace, with the shadow of the Crown of the Two

Egypts on her brows! What were reedy morasses or the tinkle of running

water to her whose barges could sweep the great Nile from the mountains

to the sea. What were petty joys and absence of petty fears to her, the

raising of whose hand could hurl armies, or draw to the water-stairs of

her palaces the commerce of the world! At whose word rose temples

filled with all the artistic beauty of the Times of Old which it was her

aim and pleasure to restore! Under whose guidance the solid rock yawned

into the sepulchre that she designed!

"Surely, surely, such a one had nobler dreams! I can feel them in my

heart; I can see them with my sleeping eyes!"

As she spoke she seemed to be inspired; and her eyes had a far-away look

as though they saw something beyond mortal sight. And then the deep

eyes filled up with unshed tears of great emotion. The very soul of the

woman seemed to speak in her voice; whilst we who listened sat

entranced.

"I can see her in her loneliness and in the silence of her mighty pride,

dreaming her own dream of things far different from those around her.

Of some other land, far, far away under the canopy of the silent night,

lit by the cool, beautiful light of the stars. A land under that

Northern star, whence blew the sweet winds that cooled the feverish

desert air. A land of wholesome greenery, far, far away. Where were no

scheming and malignant priesthood; whose ideas were to lead to power

through gloomy temples and more gloomy caverns of the dead, through an

endless ritual of death! A land where love was not base, but a divine

possession of the soul! Where there might be some one kindred spirit

which could speak to hers through mortal lips like her own; whose being

could merge with hers in a sweet communion of soul to soul, even as

their breaths could mingle in the ambient air! I know the feeling, for

I have shared it myself. I may speak of it now, since the blessing has

come into my own life. I may speak of it since it enables me to

interpret the feelings, the very longing soul, of that sweet and lovely

Queen, so different from her surroundings, so high above her time!

Whose nature, put into a word, could control the forces of the Under

World; and the name of whose aspiration, though but graven on a star-lit

jewel, could command all the powers in the Pantheon of the High Gods.

"And in the realisation of that dream she will surely be content to

rest!"

We men sat silent, as the young girl gave her powerful interpretation of

the design or purpose of the woman of old. Her every word and tone

carried with it the conviction of her own belief. The loftiness of her

thoughts seemed to uplift us all as we listened. Her noble words,

flowing in musical cadence and vibrant with internal force, seemed to

issue from some great instrument of elemental power. Even her tone was

new to us all; so that we listened as to some new and strange being from

a new and strange world. Her father's face was full of delight. I knew

now its cause. I understood the happiness that had come into his life,

on his return to the world that he knew, from that prolonged sojourn in

the world of dreams. To find in his daughter, whose nature he had never

till now known, such a wealth of affection, such a splendour of

spiritual insight, such a scholarly imagination, such … The rest of

his feeling was of hope!

The two other men were silent unconsciously. One man had had his

dreaming; for the other, his dreams were to come.

For myself, I was like one in a trance. Who was this new, radiant being

who had won to existence out of the mist and darkness of our fears?

Love has divine possibilities for the lover's heart! The wings of the

soul may expand at any time from the shoulders of the loved one, who

then may sweep into angel form. I knew that in my Margaret's nature

were divine possibilities of many kinds. When under the shade of the

overhanging willow-tree on the river, I had gazed into the depths of her

beautiful eyes, I had thenceforth a strict belief in the manifold beauties and excellences of her nature; but this soaring and understanding spirit was, indeed, a revelation. My pride, like her father's, was outside myself; my joy and rapture were complete and supreme!

When we had all got back to earth again in our various ways, Mr. Trelawny, holding his daughter's hand in his, went on with his discourse:

"Now, as to the time at which Queen Tera intended her resurrection to

take place! We are in contact with some of the higher astronomical calculations in connection with true orientation. As you know, the stars shift their relative positions in the heavens; but though the real distances traversed are beyond all ordinary comprehension, the effects

as we see them are small. Nevertheless, they are susceptible of measurement, not by years, indeed, but by centuries. It was by this

means that Sir John Herschel arrived at the date of the building of the

Great Pyramid—a date fixed by the time necessary to change the star of

the true north from Draconis to the Pole Star, and since then verified

by later discoveries. From the above there can be no doubt whatever

that astronomy was an exact science with the Egyptians at least a

thousand years before the time of Queen Tera. Now, the stars that go to

make up a constellation change in process of time their relative

positions, and the Plough is a notable example. The changes in the

position of stars in even forty centuries is so small as to be hardly

noticeable by an eye not trained to minute observances, but they can be

measured and verified. Did you, or any of you, notice how exactly the

stars in the Ruby correspond to the position of the stars in the Plough;

or how the same holds with regard to the translucent places in the Magic

Coffer?”

We all assented. He went on:

"You are quite correct. They correspond exactly. And yet when Queen

Tera was laid in her tomb, neither the stars in the Jewel nor the

translucent places in the Coffer corresponded to the position of the

stars in the Constellation as they then were!"

We looked at each other as he paused: a new light was breaking upon us.

With a ring of mastery in his voice he went on:

"Do you not see the meaning of this? Does it not throw a light on the

intention of the Queen? She, who was guided by augury, and magic, and

superstition, naturally chose a time for her resurrection which seemed

to have been pointed out by the High Gods themselves, who had seent

their message on a thunderbolt from other worlds. When such a time was

fixed by supernal wisdom, would it not be the height of human wisdom to

avail itself of it? Thus it is"—here his voice deepened and trembled with the intensity of his feeling—"that to us and our time is given the opportunity of this wondrous peep into the old world, such as has been the privilege of none other of our time; which may never be again.

"From first to last the cryptic writing and symbolism of that wondrous tomb of that wondrous woman is fullof guiding light; and the key of the many mysteries lies in that most wondrous Jewel which she held in her dead hand over the dead heart, which she hoped and believed would beat again in a newer and nobler world!

"There are only loose ends now to consider. Margaret has given us the true inwardness of the feeling of the other Queen!" He looked at her fondly, and stroked her hand as he said it. "For my own part I sincerely hope she is right; for in such case it will be a joy, I am sure, to all of us to assist at such a realisation of hope. But we must

not go too fast, or believe too much in our present state of knowledge.

The voice that we hearken for comes out of times strangely other than

our own; when human life counted for little, and when the morality of

the time made little account of the removing of obstacles in the way to

achievement of desire. We must keep our eyes fixed on the scientific

side, and wait for the developments on the psychic side.

"Now, as to this stone box, which we call the Magic Coffer. As I have

said, I am convinced that it opens only in obedience to some principle

of light, or the exercise of some of its forces at present unknown to

us. There is here much ground for conjecture and for experiment; for as

yet the scientists have not thoroughly differentiated the kinds, and

powers, and degrees of light. Without analysing various rays we may, I

think, take it for granted that there are different qualities and powers

of light; and this great field of scientific investigation is almost

virgin soil. We know as yet so little of natural forces, that

imagination need set no bounds to its flights in considering the

possibilities of the future. Within but a few years we have made such

discoveries as two centuries ago would have sent the discoverer's to the

flames. The liquefaction of oxygen; the existence of radium, of helium,

of polonium, of argon; the different powers of Rontgen and Cathode and

Bequerel rays. And as we may finally prove that there are different

kinds and qualities of light, so we may find tht combustion may have its

own powers of differentiation; that there are qualities in some flames

non-existent in others. It may be that some of the essential conditions

of substance are continuous, even in the destruction of their bases.

Last night I was thinking of this, and reasoning that as there are

certain qualities in some oils which are not in others, so there may be

certain similar or corresponding qualities or powers in the combinations

of each. I suppose we have all noticed some time or other that the

light of colza oil is not quite the same as that of paraffin, or that

the flames of coal gas and whale oil are different. They find it so in

the light-houses! All at once it occurred to me that there might be some

special virtue in the oil which had been found in the jars when Queen

Tera's tomb was opened. These had not been used to preserve the

intestines as usual, so they must have been placed there for some other

purpose. I remembered that in Van Huyn's narrative he had commented on

the way the jars were sealed. This was lightly, though effectually;

they could be opened without force. The jars were themselves preserved

in a sarcophagus which, though of immense strength and hermetically

sealed, could be opened easily. Accordingly, I went at once to examine

the jars. A little—a very little of the oil still remained, but it had

grown thick in the two and a half centuries in which the jars had been

open. Still, it was not rancid; and on examining it I found it was

cedar oil, and that it still exhaled something of its original aroma.

This gave me the idea that it was to be used to fill the lamps. Whoever

had placed the oil in the jars, and the jars in the sarcophagus, knew

that there might be shrinkage in process of time, even in vases of

alabaster, and fully allowed for it; for each of the jars would have

filled the lamps half a dozen times. With part of the oil remaining I

made some experiments, therefore, which may give useful results. You

know, Doctor, that cedar oil, which was much used in the preparation and

ceremonials of the Egyptian dead, has a certain refractive power which

we do not find in other oils. For instance, we use it on the lenses of

our microscopes to give additional clearness of vision. Last night I

put some in one of the lamps, and placed it near a translucent part of

the Magic Coffer. The effect was very great; the glow of light within

was fuller and more intense than I could have imagined, where an

electric light similarly placed had little, if any, effect. I should

have tried others of the seven lamps, but that my supply of oil ran out.

This, however, is on the road to rectification. I have sent for more

cedar oil, and expect to have before long an ample supply. Whatever may

happen from other causes, our experiment shall not, at all events, fail

from this. We shall see! We shall see!”

Doctor Winchester had evidently been following the logical process of

the other’s mind, for his comment was:

“I do hope that when the light is effective in opening the box, the

mechanism will not be impaired or destroyed.”

His doubt as to this gave anxious thought to some of us.

Chapter XVI

The Cavern

In the evening Mr. Trelawny took again the whole party into the study.

When we were all attention he began to unfold his plans:

"I have come to the conclusion that for the proper carrying out of what

we will call our Great Experiment we must have absolute and complete

isolation. Isolation not merely for a day or two, but for as long as we

may require. Here such a thing would be impossible; the needs and

habits of a great city with its ingrained possibilities of interruption,

would, or might, quite upset us. Telegrams, registered letters, or

express messengers would alone be sufficient; but the great army of

those who want to get something would make disaster certain. In

addition, the occurrences of the last week have drawn police attention

to this house. Even if special instructions to keep an eye on it have

not been issued from Scotland Yard or the District Station, you may be

sure that the individual policeman on his rounds will keep it well under

observation. Besides, the servants who have discharged themselves will

before long begin to talk. They must; for they have, for the sake of

their own characters, to give some reason for the termination of a

service which has I should say a position in the neighbourhood. The

servants of the neighbours will begin to talk, and, perhaps the

neighbours themselves. Then the active and intelligent Press will, with

its usual zeal for the enlightenment of the public and its eye to

increase of circulation, get hold of the matter. When the reporter is

after us we shall not have much chance of privacy. Even if we were to

bar ourselves in, we should not be free from interruption, possibly from

intrusion. Either would ruin our plans, and so we must take measures to

effect a retreat, carrying all our impedimenta with us. For this I am

prepared. For a long time past I have foreseen such a possibility, and

have made preparation for it. Of course, I had no foreknowledge of what

has happened; but I knew something would, or might, happen. For more

than two years past my house in Cornwall has been made ready to receive

all the curios which are preserved here. When Corbeck went off on his

search for the lamps I had the old house at Kyllion made ready; it is

fitted with electric light all over, and all the appliances for

manufacture of the light are complete. I had perhaps better tell you,

for none of you, not even Margaret, knows anything of it, that the house

is absolutely shut out from public access or even from view. It stands

on a little rocky promontory behind a steep hill, and except from the

sea cannot be seen. Of old it was fenced in by a high stone wall, for

the house which it succeeded was built by an ancestor of mine in the

days when a great house far away from a centre had to be prepared to

defend itself. Here, then, is a place so well adapted to our needs that

it might have been prepared on purpose. I shall explain it to you when

we are all there. This will not be long, for already our movement is in

train. I have sent word to Marvin to have all preparation for our

transport ready. He is to have a special train, which is to run at

night so as to avoid notice. Also a number of carts and stone-wagons,

with sufficient men and appliances to take all our packing-cases to

Paddington. We shall be away before the Argus-eyed Pressman is on the

watch. We shall today begin our packing up; and I dare say that by

tomorrow night we shall be ready. In the outhouses I have all the

packing-cases which were used for bringing the things from Egypt, and I

am satisfied that as they were sufficient for the journey across the

desert and down the Nile to Alexandria and thence on to London, they

will serve without fail between here and Kyllion. We four men, with

Margaret to hand us such things as we may require, will be able to get

the things packed safely; and the carrier's men will take them to the

trucks.

"today the servants go to Kyllion, and Mrs. Grant will make such

arrangements as may be required. She will take a stock of necessaries

with her, so that we will not attract local attention by our daily

needs; and will keep us supplied with perishable food from London.

Thanks to Margaret's wise and generous treatment of the servants who

decided to remain, we have got a staff on which we can depend. They

have been already cautioned to secrecy, so that we need not fear gossip

from within. Indeed, as the servants will be in London after their

preparations at Kyllion are complete, there will not be much subject for

gossip, in detail at any rate.

"As, however, we should commence the immediate work of packing at once,

we will leave over the after proceedings till later when we have

leisure."

Accordingly we set about our work. Under Mr. Trelawny's guidance, and

aided by the servants, we took from the outhouses great packing-cases.

Some of these were of enormous strength, fortified by many thicknesses

of wood, and by iron bands and rods with screw-ends and nuts. We placed

them throughout the house, each close to the object which it was to

contain. When this preliminary work had been effected, and there had

been placed in each room and in the hall great masses of new hay,

cotton-waste and paper, the servants were sent away. Then we set about

packing.

No one, not accustomed to packing, could have the slightest idea of the

amount of the amount of work involved in such a task as that in which in

we were engaged. For my own part I had had a vague idea that there were

a large number of Egyptian objects in Mr. Trelawny's house; but until I

came to deal with them seriatim I had little idea of either their

importance, the size of some of them, or of their endless number. Far

into the night we worked. At times we used all the strength which we

could muster on a single object; again we worked separately, but always

under Mr. Trelawny's immediate direction. He himself, assisted by

Margaret, kept an exact tall of each piece.

It was only when we sat down, utterly wearied, to a long-delayed supper

that we began to realised that a large part of the work was done. Only

a few of the packing-cases, however, were closed; for a vast amount of

work still remained. We had finished some of the cases, each of which

held only one of the great sarcophagi. The cases which held many objects

could not be closed till all had been differentiated and packed.

I slept that night without movement or without dreams; and on our

comparing notes in the morning, I found that each of the others had had

the same experience.

By dinner-time next evening the whole work was complete, and all was

ready for the carriers who were to come at midnight. A little before

the appointed time we heard the rumble of carts; then we were shortly

invaded by an army of workmen, who seemed by sheer force of numbers to

move without effort, in an endless procession, all our prepared

packages. A little over an hour sufficed them, and when the carts had

rumbled away, we all got ready to follow them to Paddington. Silvio was

of course to be taken as one of our party.

Before leaving we went in a body over the house, which looked desolate

indeed. As the servants had all gone to Cornwall there had been no

attempt at tidying-up; every room and passage in which we had worked,

and all the stairways, were strewn with paper and waste, and marked with

dirty feet.

The last thing which Mr. Trelawny did before coming away was to take

from the great safe the Ruby with the Seven Stars. As he put it safely

into his pocket-book, Margaret, who had all at once seemed to grow

deadly tired and stood beside her father pale and rigid, suddenly became

all aglow, as though the sight of the Jewel had inspired her. She

smiled at her father approvingly as she said:

"You are right, Father. There will not be any more trouble tonight.

She will not wreck your arrangements for any cause. I would stake my

life upon it."

"She—or something—wrecked us in the desert when we had come from the

tomb in the Valley of the Sorcerer!" was the grim comment of Corbeck,

who was standing by. Margaret answered him like a flash:

“Ah! she was then near her tomb from which for thousands of years her

body had not been moved. She must know that things are different now.”

“How must she know?” asked Corbeck keenly.

“If she has that astral body that Father spoke of, surely she must know!

How can she fail to, with an invisible presence and an intellect that

can roam abroad even to the stars and the worlds beyond us!” She

paused, and her father said solemnly:

“It is on that supposition that we are proceeding. We must have the

courage of our convictions, and act on them—to the last!”

Margaret took his hand and held it in a dreamy kind of way as we filed

out of the house. She was holding it still when he locked the hall

door, and when we moved up the road to the gateway, whence we took a cab

to Paddington.

When all the goods were loaded at the station, the whole of the workmen

went on to the train; this took also some of the stone-wagons used for

carrying the cases with the great sarcophagi. Ordinary carts and plenty

of horses were to be found at Westerton, which was our station for

Kyllion. Mr. Trelawny had ordered a sleeping-carriage for our party;

as soon as the train had started we all turned into our cubicles.

That night I slept sound. There was over me a conviction of security

which was absolute and supreme. Margaret's definite announcement:

"There will not be any trouble tonight!" seemed to carry assurance with

it. I did not question it; nor did anyone else. It was only afterwards

that I began to think as to how she was so sure. The train was a slow

one, stopping many times and for considerable intervals. As Mr.

Trelawny did not wish to arrive at Westerton before dark, there was no

need to hurry; and arrangements had been made to feed the workmen at

certain places on the journey. We had our own hamper with us in the

private car.

All that afternoon we talked over the Great Experiment, which seemed to

have become a definite entity in our thoughts. Mr. Trelawny became more

and more enthusiastic as the time wore on; hope was with him becoming

certainty. Doctor Winchester seemed to become imbued with some of his

spirit, though at times he would throw out some scientific fact which

would either make an impasse to the other's line of argument, or would

come as an arresting shock. Mr. Corbeck, on the other hand, seemed

slightly antagonistic to the theory. It may have been that whilst the

opinions of the others advanced, his own stood still; but the effect was

an attitude which appeared negative, if not wholly one of negation.

As for Margaret, she seemed to be in some way overcome. Either it was

some new phase of feeling with her, or else she was taking the issue

more seriously than she had yet done. She was generally more or less

distraite, as though sunk in a brown study; from this she would recover

herself with a start. This was usually when there occurred some marked

episode in the journey, such as stopping at a station, or when the

thunderous rumble of crossing a viaduct woke the echoes of the hills or

cliffs around us. On each such occasion she would plunge into the

conversation, taking such a part in it as to show that, whatever had

been her abstracted thought, her senses had taken in fully all that had

gone on around her. Towards myself her manner was strange. Sometimes

it was marked by a distance, half shy, half haughty, which was new to

me. At other times there were moments of passion in look and gesture

which almost made me dizzy with delight. Little, however, of a marked

nature transpired during the journey. There was but one episode which

had in it any element of alarm, but as we were all asleep at the time it

did not disturb us. We only learned it from a communicative guard in the

morning. Whilst running between Dawlish and Teignmouth the train was

stopped by a warning given by someone who moved a torch to and fro right

on the very track. The driver had found on pulling up that just ahead

of the train a small landslip had taken place, some of the red earth

from the high bank having fallen away. It did not however reach to the

metals; and the driver had resumed his way, none too well pleased at the

delay. To use his own words, the guard thought "there was too much

bally caution on this 'ere line!'"

We arrived at Westerton about nine o'clock in the evening. Carts and

horses were in waiting, and the work of unloading the train began at

once. Our own party did not wait to see the work done, as it was in the

hands of competent people. We took the carriage which was in waiting,

and through the darkness of the night sped on to Kyllion.

We were all impressed by the house as it appeared in the bright

moonlight. A great grey stone mansion of the Jacobean period; vast and

spacious, standing high over the sea on the very verge of a high cliff.

When we had swept round the curve of the avenue cut through the rock,

and come out on the high plateau on which the house stood, the crash and

murmur of waves breaking against rock far below us came with an

invigorating breath of moist sea air. We understood then in an instant

how well we were shut out from the world on that rocky shelf above the

sea.

Within the house we found all ready. Mrs. Grant and her staff had

worked well, and all was bright and fresh and clean. We took a brief

survey of the chief rooms and then separated to have a wash and to

change our clothes after our long journey of more than four-and-twenty

hours.

We had supper in the great dining-room on the south side, the walls of

which actually hung over the sea. The murmur came up muffled, but it

never ceased. As the little promontory stood well out into the sea, the

northern side of the house was open; and the due north was in no way

shut out by the great mass of rock, which, reared high above us, shut

out the rest of the world. Far off across the bay we could see the

trembling lights of the castle, and here and there along the shore the

faint light of a fisher's window. For the rest the sea was a dark blue

plain with an occasional flicker of light as the gleam of starlight fell

on the slope of a swelling wave.

When supper was over we all adjourned to the room which Mr. Trelawny had

set aside as his study, his bedroom being close to it. As we entered, the first thing I noticed was a great safe, somewhat similar to that which stood in his room in London. When we were in the room Mr. Trelawny went over to the table, and, taking out his pocket-book, laid it on the table. As he did so he pressed down on it with the palm of his hand. A strange pallor came over his face. With fingers that trembled he opened the book, saying as he did so:

"Its bulk does not seem the same; I hope nothing has happened!"

All three of us men crowded round close. Margaret alone remained calm; she stood erect and silent, and still as a statue. She had a far-away look in her eyes, as though she did not either know or care what was going on around her.

With a despairing gesture Trelawny threw open the pouch of the pocket-book wherein he had placed the Jewel of Seven Stars. As he sank

down on the chair which stood close to him, he said in a hoarse voice:

"My God! it is gone. Without it the Great Experiment can come to

nothing!"

His words seemed to wake Margaret from her introspective mood. An

agonised spasm swept her face; but almost on the instant she was calm.

She almost smiled as she said:

"You may have left it in your room, Father. Perhaps it has fallen out

of the pocket-book whilst you were changing." Without a word we all

hurried into the next room through the open door between the study and

the bedroom. And then a sudden calm fell on us like a cloud of fear.

There! on the table, lay the Jewel of Seven Stars, shining and sparkling

with lurid light, as though each of the seven points of each the seven

stars gleamed through blood!

Timidly we each looked behind us, and then at each other. Margaret was

now like the rest of us. She had lost her statuesque calm. All the

introspective rigidity had gone from her; and she clasped her hands

together till the knuckles were white.

Without a word Mr. Trelawny raised the Jewel, and hurried with it into

the next room. As quietly as he could he opened the door of the safe

with the key fastened to his wrist and placed the Jewel within. When

the heavy doors were closed and locked he seemed to breathe more freely.

Somehow this episode, though a disturbing one in many ways, seemed to

bring us back to our old selves. Since we had left London we had all

been overstrained; and this was a sort of relief. Another step in our

strange enterprise had been effected.

The change back was more marked in Margaret than in any of us. Perhaps

it was that she was a woman, whilst we were men; perhaps it was that she

was younger than the rest; perhaps both reasons were effective, each in

its own way. At any rate the change was there, and I was happier than I

had been through the long journey. All her buoyancy, her tenderness,

her deep feeling seemed to shine forth once more; now and again as her

father's eyes rested on her, his face seemed to light up.

Whilst we waited for the carts to arrive, Mr. Trelawny took us through

the house, pointing out and explaining where the objects which we had

brought with us were to be placed. In one respect only did he withhold

confidence. The positions of all those things which had connection with

the Great Experiment were not indicated. The cases containing them were

to be left in the outer hall, for the present.

By the time we had made the survey, the carts began to arrive; and the

stir and bustle of the previous night were renewed. Mr. Trelawny stood

in the hall beside the massive ironbound door, and gave directions as to

the placing of each of the great packing-cases. Those containing many

items were placed in the inner hall where they were to be unpacked.

In an incredibly short time the whole consignment was delivered; and the

m en departed with a douceur for each, given through their foreman,

which made them effusive in their thanks. Then we all went to our own

rooms. There was a strange confidence over us all. I do not think that

any one of us had a doubt as the the quiet passing of the remainder of

the night.

The faith was justified, for on our re-assembling in the morning we

found that all had slept well and peaceably.

During that day all the curios, except those required for the Great

Experiment, were put into the places designed for them. Then it was

arranged that all the servants should go back with Mrs. Grant to London

on the next morning.

When they had all gone Mr. Trelawny, having seen the doors locked, took

us into the study.

"Now," said he when we were seated, "I have a secret to impart; but,

according to an old promise which does not leave me free, I must ask you

each to give me a solemn promise not to reveal it. For three hundred

years at least such a promise has been exacted from everyone to whom it

ws told, and more than once life and safety were secured through loyal

observance of the promise. Even as it is, I am breaking the letter, if

not the spirit of the tradition; for I should only tell it to the immediate members of my family."

We all gave the promise required. Then he went on:

"There is a secret place in this house, a cave, natural originally but finished by labour, underneath this house. I will not undertake to say that it has always been used according to the law. During the Bloody Assize more than a few Cornishmen found refuge in it; and later, and earlier, it formed, I have no doubt whatever, a useful place for storing contraband goods. 'Tre Pol and Pen', I suppose you know, have always been smugglers; and their relations and friends and neighbours have not held back from the enterprise. For all such reasons a safe hiding-place was always considered a valuable possession; and as the heads of our House have always insisted on preserving the secret, I am in honour bound to it. Later on, if all be well, I shall of course tell you,

Margaret, and you too, Ross, under the conditions that I am bound to

make."

He rose up, and we all followed him. Leaving us in the outer hall, he

went away alone for a few minutes; and returning, beckoned us to follow

him.

In the inside hall we found a whole section of an outstanding angle

moved away, and from the cavity saw a great hole dimly dark, and the

beginning of a rough staircase cut in the rock. As it was not pitch

dark there was manifestly some means of lighting it naturally, so

without pause we followed our host as he descended. After some forty or

fifty steps cut in a winding passage, we came to a great cave whose

further end tapered away into blackness. It was a huge place, dimly lit

by a few irregular slits of eccentric shape. Manifestly these were

faults in the rock which would readily allow the windows be disguised.

Close to each of them was a hanging shutter which could be easily swung

across by means of a dangling rope. The sound of the ceaseless beat of

the waves came up muffled from far below. Mr. Trelawny at once began to

speak:

"This is the spot which I have chosen, as the best I know, for the scene

of our Great Experiment. In a hundred different ways it fulfils the

conditions which I am led to believe are primary with regard to success.

Here, we are, and shall be, as isolated as Queen Tera herself would have

been in her rocky tomb in the Valley of the Sorcerer, and still in a

rocky cavern. For good or ill we must here stand by our chances, and

abide by results. If we are successful we shall be able to let in on

the world of modern science such a flood of light from the Old World as

will change every condition of thought and experiment and practice. If

we fail, then even the knowledge of our attempt will die with us. For

this, and all else which may come, I believe we are prepared!" He paused. No one spoke, but we all bowed our heads gravely in acquiescence. He resumed, but with a certain hesitancy:

"It is not yet too late! If any of you have a doubt or misgiving, for God's speak it now! Whoever it may be, can go hence without let or hindrance. The rest of us can go on our way alone!"

Again he paused, and looked keenly at us in turn. We looked at each other; but no one quailed. For my own part, if I had had any doubt as to going on, the look on Margaret's face would have reassured me. It was fearless; it was intense; it was full of a divine calm.

Mr. Trelawny took a long breath, and in a more cheerful, as well as in a more decided tone, went on:

"As we are all of one mind, the sooner we get the necessary matters in

train the better. Let me tell you that this place, like all the rest of

the house, can be lit with electricity. We could not join the wires to

the mains lest our secret should become known, but I have a cable her

which we can attach in the hall and complete the circuit!" As he was

speaking, he began to ascend the steps. From close to the entrance he

took the end of a cable; this he drew forward and attached to a switch

in the wall. Then, turning on a tap, he flooded the whole vault and

staircase below with light. I could now see from the volume of light

streaming up into the hallway that the hole beside the staircase went

direct into the cave. Above it was a pulley and a mass of strong tackle

with multiplying blocks of the Smeaton order. Mr. Trelawny, seeing me

looking at this, said, correctly interpreting my thoughts:

"Yes! it is new. I hung it there myself on purpose. I knew we should

have to lower great weights; and as I did not wish to take too many into

my confidence, I arranged a tackle which I could work alone if

necessary.”

We set to work at once; and before nightfall had lowered, unhooked, and

placed in the positions designated for each by Trelawny, all the great

sarcophagi and all the curios and other matters which we had taken with

us.

It was a strange and weird proceeding, the placing of those wonderful

monuments of a bygone age in that green cavern, which represented in its

cutting and purpose and up-to-date mechanism and electric lights both

the old world and the new. But as time went on I grew more and more to

recognise the wisdom and correctness of Mr. Trelawny’s choice. I was

much disturbed when Silvio, who had been brought into the cave in the

arms of his mistress, and who was lying asleep on my coat which I had

taken off, sprang up when the cat mummy had been unpacked, and flew at

it with the same ferocity which he had previously exhibited. The

incident showed Margaret in a new phase, and one which gave my heart a

pang. She had been standing quite still at one side of the cave leaning

on a sarcophagus, in one of those fits of abstraction which had of late

come upon her; but on hearing the sound, and seeing Silvio's violent

onslaught, she seemed to fall into a positive fury of passion. Her eyes

blazed, and her mouth took a hard, cruel tension which was new to me.

Instinctively she stepped towards Silvio as if to interfere in the

attack. But I too had stepped forward; and as she caught my eye a

strange spasm came upon her, and she stopped. Its intensity made me

hold my breath; and I put up my hand to clear your eyes. When I had

done this, she had on the instant recovered her calm, and there was a

look of brief wonder on her face. With all her old grace and sweetness

she swept over and lifted Silvio, just as she had done on former occasions, and held him in her arms, petting him and treating him as though he were a little child who had erred.

As I looked a strange fear came over me. The Margaret that I knew seemed to be changing; and in my inmost heart I prayed that the disturbing cause might soon come to an end. More than ever I longed at that moment that our terrible Experiment should come to a prosperous termination.

When all had been arranged in the room as Mr. Trelawny wished he turned to us, one after another, till he had concentrated the intelligence of us all upon him. Then he said:

"All is now ready in this place. We must only await the proper time to begin."

We were silent for a while. Doctor Winchester was the first to speak:

"What is the proper time? Have you any approximation, even if you are

not satisfied as to the exact day?" He answered at once:

"After the most anxious thought I have fixed on July 31!"

"May I ask why that date?" He spoke his answer slowly:

"Queen Tera was ruled in great degree by mysticism, and there are so

many evidences that she looked for resurrection that naturally she would

choose a period ruled over by a God specialised to such a purpose. Now,

the fourth month of the season of Inundation was ruled by Harmachis,

this being the name for 'Ra', the Sun-God, at his rising in the morning,

and therefore typifying the awakening or arising. This arising is

manifestly to physical life, since it is of the mid-world of human daily

life. Now as this month begins on our 25th July, the seventh day would

be July 31st, for you may be sure that the mystic Queen would not have

chosen any day but the seventh or some power of seven.

"I dare say that some of you have womdered why our preparations have

been so deliberately undertaken. This is why! We must be ready in

every possible way when the time comes; but there was no use in having

to wait round for a needless number of days."

And so we waited only for the 31st of July, the next day but one, when

the Great Experiment would be made.

Chapter XVII

Doubts and Fears

We learn of great things by little experiences. The history of ages is but an indefinite repetition of the history of hours. The record of a soul is but a multiple of the story of a moment. The Recording Angel writes in the Great Book in no rainbow tints; his pen is dipped in no colours but light and darkness. For the eye of infinite wisdom there is no need of shading. All things, all thoughts, all emotions, all experiences, all doubts and hopes and fears, all intentions, all wishes seen down to the lower strata of their concrete and multitudinous elements, are finally resolved into direct opposites.

Did any human being wish for the epitome of a life wherein were gathered and grouped all the experiences that a child of Adam could have, the history, fully and frankly written, of my own mind during the next forty-eight hours would afford him all that could be wanted. And the Recorder could have wrought as usual in sunlight and shadow, which may

be taken to represent the final expressions of Heaven and Hell. For in

the highest Heaven is Faith; and Doubt hangs over the yawning blackness

of Hell.

There were of course times of sunshine in those two days; moments when,

in the realisation of Margaret's sweetness and her love for me, all

doubts were dissipated like morning mist before the sun. But the

balance of the time-and an overwhelming balance it was-gloom hung over

me like a pall. The hour, in whose coming I had acquiesced, was

approaching so quickly and was already so near that the sense of

finality was bearing upon me! The issue was perhaps life or death to

any of us; but for this we were all prepared. Margaret and I were one

as to the risk. The question of the moral aspect of the case, which

involved the religious belief in which I had been reared, was not one to

trouble me; for the issues, and the causes that lay behind them, were

not within my power even to comprehend. The doubt of the success of the

Great Experiment was such a doubt as exists in all enterprises which

have great possibilities. To me, whose life was passed in a series of

intellectual struggles, this form of doubt was a stimulus, rather than

deterrent. What then was it that made for me a trouble, which became an

anguish when my thoughts dwelt long on it?

I was beginning to doubt Margaret!

What it was that I doubted I knew not. It was not her love, or her

honour, or her truth, or her kindness, or her zeal. What then was it?

It was herself!

Margaret was changing! At times during the past few days I had hardly

known her as the same girl whom I had met at the picnic, and whose

vigils I had shared in the sick-room of her father. Then, even in her

moments of greatest sorrow or fright or anxiety, she was all life and

thought and keenness. Now she was generally distraite, and at times in

a sort of negative condition as though her mind—her very being—was not

present. At such moments she would have full possession of observation

and memory. She would know and remember all that was going on, and had

gone on around her; but her coming back to her old self had to me

something the sensation of a new person coming into the room. Up to the

time of leaving London I had been content whenever she was present. I

had over me that delicious sense of security which comes with the

consciousness that love is mutual. But now doubt had taken its place.

I never knew whether the personality present was my Margaret—the old

Margaret whom I had loved at the first glance—or the other new Margaret,

whom I hardly understood, and whose intellectual aloofness made an

impalpable barrier between us. Sometimes she would become, as it were,

awake all at once. At such times, though she would say to me sweet and

pleasant things which she had often said before, she would seem most

unlike herself. It was almost as if she was speaking parrot-like or at

dictation of one who could read words or acts, but not thoughts. After

one or two experiences of this kind, my own doubting began to make a

barrier; for I could not speak with the ease and freedom which were

usual to me. And so hour by hour we drifted apart. Were it not for the

few odd moments when the old Margaret was back with me full of her charm

I do not know what would have happened. As it was, each such moment

gave me a fresh start and kept my love from changing.

I would have given the world for a confidant; but this was impossible.

How could I speak a doubt of Margaret to anyone, even her father! How

could I speak a doubt to Margaret, when Margaret herself was the theme!

I could only endure—and hope. And of the two the endurance was the

lesser pain.

I think that Margaret must have at times felt that there was some cloud

between us, for towards the end of the first day she began to shun me a

little; or perhaps it was that she had become more diffident that usual

about me. Hitherto she had sought every opportunity of being with me,

just as I had tried to be with her; so that now any avoidance, one of

the other, made a new pain to us both.

On this day the household seemed very still. Each one of us was about

his own work, or occupied with his own thoughts. We only met at meal

times; and then, though we talked, all seemed more or less preoccupied.

There was not in the house even the stir of the routine of service. The

precaution of Mr. Trelawny in having three rooms prepared for each of us

had rendered servants unnecessary. The dining-room was solidly prepared

with cooked provisions for several days. Towards evening I went out by

myself for a stroll. I had looked for Margaret to ask her to come with

me; but when I found her, she was in one of her apathetic moods, and the

charm of her presence seemed lost to me. Angry with myself, but unable

to quell my own spirit of discontent, I went out alone over the rocky

headland.

On the cliff, with the wide expanse of wonderful sea before me, and no

sound but the dash of waves below and the harsh screams of the seagulls

above, my thoughts ran free. Do what I would, they returned

continuously to one subject, the solving of the doubt that was upon me.

Here in the solitude, amid the wide circle of Nature’s foce and strife,

my mind began to work truly. Unconsciously I found myself asking a

question which I would not allow myself to answer. At last the persistence of a mind working truly prevailed; I found myself face to face with my doubt. The habit of my life began to assert itself, and I analysed the evidence before me.

It was so startling that I had to force myself into obedience to logical effort. My starting-place was this: Margaret was changed—in what way,

and by what means? Was it her character, or her mind, or her nature? for

her physical appearance remained the same. I began to group all that I

had ever heard of her, beginning at her birth.

It was strange at the very first. She had been, according to Corbeck's

statement, born of a dead mother during the time that her father and his

friend were in a trance in the tomb at Aswan. That trance was

presumably effected by a woman; a woman mummied, yet preserving as we

had every reason to believe from after experience, an astral body

subject to a free will and an active intelligence. With that astral

body, space ceased to exist. The vast distance between London and Aswan

became as naught; and whatever power of necromancy the Sorceress had

might have been exercised over the dead mother, and possibly the dead

child.

The dead child! Was it possible that the child was dead and was made

alive again? Whence then came the animating spirit—the soul? Logic was

pointing the way to me now with a vengeance!

If the Egyptian belief was true for Egyptians, then the “Ka” of the dead

Queen and her “Khu” could animate what she might choose. In such case

Margaret would not be an individual at all, but simply a phase of Queen

Tera herself; an astral body obedient to her will!

Here I revolted against logic. Every fibre of my being resented such a

conclusion. How could I believe that there was no Margaret at all; but

just an animated image, used by the Double of a woman of forty centuries

ago to its own ends … ! Somehow, the outlook was brighter to me now,

despite the new doubts.

At least I had Margaret!

Back swung the logical pendulum again. The child then was not dead. If

so, had the Sorceress had anything to do with her birth at all? It was

evident—so I took it again from Corbeck—that there was a strange

likeness between Margaret and the pictures of Queen Tera. How could

this be? It could not be any birth-mark reproducing what had been in

the mother's mind; for Mrs. Trelawny had never seen the pictures. Nay,

even her father had not seen them till he had found his way into the

tomb only a few days before her birth. This phase I could not get rid

of so easily as the last; the fibres of my being remained quiet. There

remained to me the horror of doubt. And even then, so strange is the

mind of man, Doubt itself took a concrete image; a vast and impenetrable

gloom, through which flickered irregularly and spasmodically tiny points

of evanescent light, which seemed to quicken the darkness into a

positive existence.

The remaining possibility of relations between Margaret and the mummied

Queen was, that in some occult way the Sorceress had power to change

places with the other. This view of things could not be so lightly

thrown aside. There were too many suspicious circumstances to warrant

this, now that my attention was fixed on it and my intelligence

recognised the possibility. Hereupon there began to come into my mind

all the strange incomprehensible matters which had whirled through our

lives in the last few days. At first they all crowded in upon me in a

jumbled mass; but again the habit of mind of my working life prevailed,

and they took order. I found it now easier to control myself; for there

was something to grasp, some work to be done; though it was of a sorry

kind, for it was or might be antagonistic to Margaret. But Margaret was

herself at stake! I was thinking of her and fighting for her; and yet

if I were to work in the dark, I might be even harmful to her. My first

weapon in her defence was truth. I must know and understand; I might

then be able to act. Certainly, I could not act beneficently without a

just conception and recognition of the facts. Arranged in order these

were as follows:

Firstly: the strange likeness of Queen Tera to Margaret who had been

born in another country a thousand miles away, where her mother could

not possibly have had even a passing knowledge of her appearance.

Secondly: the disappearance of Van Huyn's book when I had read up to

the description of the Star Ruby.

Thirdly: the finding of the lamps in the boudoir. Tera with her astral

body could have unlocked the door of Corbeck's room in the hotel, and

have locked it again after her exit with the lamps. She could in the

same way have opened the window, and put the lamps in the boudoir. It

need not have been that Margaret in her own person should have had any

hand in this; but—but it was at least strange.

Fourthly: here the suspicions of the Detective and the Doctor came back

to me with renewed force, and with a larger understanding.

Fifthly: there were the occasions on which Margaret foretold with

accuracy the coming occasions of quietude, as though she had some

conviction or knowledge of the intentions of the astral-bodied Queen.

Sixthly: there was her suggestion of the finding of the Ruby which her

father had lost. As I thought now afresh over this episode in the light

of suspicion in which her own powers were involved, the only conclusion

I could come to was—always supposing that the theory of the Queen's

astral power was correct—that Queen Tera being anxious that all should

go well in the movement from London to Kyllion had in her own way taken

the Jewel from Mr. Trelawny's pocket-book, finding it of some use in her

supernatural guardianship of the journey. Then in some mysterious way

she had, through Margaret, made the suggestion of its loss and finding.

Seventhly, and lastly, was the strange dual existence which Margaret

seemed of late to be leading; and which in some way seemed a consequence

or corollary of all that had gone before.

The dual existence! This was indeed the conclusion which overcame all

difficulties and reconciled opposites. If indeed Margaret were not in

all ways a free agent, but could be compelled to speak or act as she

might be instructed; or if her whole being could be changed for another

without the possibility of any one noticing the doing of it, then all

things were possible. All would depend on the spirit of the

individuality by which she could be so compelled. If this individuality

were just and kind and clean, all might be well. But if not! … The

thought was too awful for words. I ground my teeth with futile rage, as

the ideas of horrible possibilities swept through me.

Up to this morning Margaret's lapses into her new self had been few and

hardly noticeable, save when once or twice her attitude towards myself

had been marked by a bearing strange to me. But today the contrary was

the case; and the change presaged badly. It might be that that other

individuality was of the lower, not of the better sort! Now that I thought of it I had reason to fear. In the history of the mummy, from the time of Van Huyn's breaking into the tomb, the record of deaths that we knew of, presumably effected by her will and agency, was a startling one. The Arab who had stolen the hand from the mummy; and the one who had taken it from his body. The Arab chief who had tried to steal the Jewel from Van Huyn, and whose throat bore the marks of seven fingers.

The two men found dead on the first night of Trelawny's taking away the sarcophagus; and the three on the return to the tomb. The Arab who had opened the secret serdab. Nine dead men, one of them slain manifestly by the Queen's own hand! And beyond this again the several savage attacks on Mr. Trelawny in his own room, in which, aided by her Familiar, she had tried to open the safe and to extract the Talisman jewel. His device of fastening the key to his wrist by a steel bangle, though successful in the end, had wellnigh cost him his life.

If then the Queen, intent on her resurrection under her own conditions

had, so to speak, waded to it through blood, what might she not do were

her purpose thwarted? What terrible step might she not take to effect

her wishes? Nay, what were her wishes; what was her ultimate purpose?

As yet we had had only Margaret's statement of them, given in all the

glorious enthusiasm of her lofty soul. In her record there was no

expression of love to be sought or found. All we knew for certain was

that she had set before her the object of resurrection, and that in it

the North which she had manifestly loved was to have a special part.

But that the resurrection was to be accomplished in the lonely tomb in

the Valley of the Sorcerer was apparent. All preparations had been

carefully made for accomplishment from within, and for her ultimate exit

in her new and living form. The sarcophagus was unlidded. The oil jars,

though hermetically sealed, were to be easily opened by hand; and in

them provision was made for shrinkage through a vast period of time.

Even flint and steel were provided for the production of flame. The

Mummy Pit was left open in violation of usage; and beside the stone door

on the cliff side was fixed an imperishable chain by which she might in

safety descend to earth. But as to what her after intentions were we had

no clue. If it was that she meant to begin life again as a humble

individual, there was something so noble in the thought that it even

warmed my heart to her and turned my wishes to her success.

The very idea seemed to endorse Margaret's magnificent tribute to her

purpose, and helped to calm my troubled spirit.

Then and there, with this feeling strong upon me, I determined to warn

Margaret and her father of dire possibilities; and to await, as well

content as I could in my ignorance, the development of things over which

I had no power.

I returned to the house in a different frame of mind to that in which I

had left it; and was enchanted to find Margaret—the old Margaret—

waiting for me.

After dinner, when I was alone for a time with the father and daughter,

I opened the subject, though with considerable hesitation:

"Would it not be well to take every possible precaution, in case the

Queen may not wish what we are doing, with regard to what may occur

before the Experiment; and at or after her waking, if it comes off?"

Margaret's answer came back quickly; so quickly that I was convinced she

must have had it ready for some one:

"But she does approve! Surely it cannot be otherwise. Father is doing,

with all his brains and all his energy and all his great courage, just

exactly what the great Queen had arranged!"

"But," I answered, "that can hardly be. All that she arranged was in a

tomb high up in a rock, in a desert solitude, shut away from the world

by every conceivable means. She seems to have depended on this isolation

to insure against accident. Surely, here in another country and age,

with quite different conditions, she may in her anxiety make mistakes

and treat any of you—of us—as she did those others in times gone past.

Nine men that we know of have been slain by her own hand or by her

instigation. She can be remorseless if she will." It did not strike me

till afterwards when I was thinking over this conversation, how

thoroughly I had accepted the living and conscious condition of Queen

Tera as a fact. Before I spoke, I had feared I might offend Mr.

Trelawny; but to my pleasant surprise he smiled quite genially as he

answered me:

"My dear fellow, in a way you are quite right. The Queen did

undoubtedly intend isolation; and, all told, it would be best that her experiment should be made as she arranged it. But just think, that became impossible when once the Dutch explorer had broken into her tomb.

That was not my doing. I am innocent of it, though it was the cause of my setting out to rediscover the sepulchre. Mind, I do not say for a moment that I would not have done just the same as Van Huyn. I went into the tomb from curiosity; and I took away what I did, being fired with the zeal of acquisitiveness which animates the collector. But, remember also, that at this time I did not know of the Queen's intention of resurrection; I had no idea of the completeness of her preparations.

All that came long afterwards. But when it did come, I have done all that I could to carry out her wishes to the full. My only fear is that I may have misinterpreted some of her cryptic instructions, or have omitted or overlooked something. But of this I am certain; I have left undone nothing that I can imagine right to be done; and I have done

nothing that I know of to clash with Queen Tera's arrangement. I want

her Great Experiment to succeed. To this end I have not spared labour

or time or money—or myself. I have endured hardship, and braved danger.

All my brains; all my knowledge and learning, such as they are; all my

endeavours such as they can be, have been, are, and shall be devoted to

this end, till we either win or lose the great stake that we play for."

"The great stake?" I repeated; "the resurrection of the woman, and the

woman's life? The proof that resurrection can be accomplished; by

magical powers; by scientific knowledge; or by use of some force which

at present the world does not know?"

Then Mr. Trelawny spoke out the hopes of his heart which up to now he

had indicated rather than expressed. Once or twice I had heard Corbeck

speak of the fiery energy of his youth; but, save for the noble words of

Margaret when she had spoken of Queen Tera's hope—which coming from his

daughter made possible a belief that her power was in some sense due to

heredity—I had seen no marked sign of it. But now his words, sweeping

before them like a torrent all antagonistic thought, gave me a new idea

of the man.

"'A woman's life!' What is a woman's life in the scale with what we

hope for! Why, we are risking already a woman's life; the dearest life

to me in all the world, and that grows more dear with every hour that

passes. We are risking as well the lives of four men; yours and my own,

as well as those two others who have been won to our confidence. 'The

proof that resurrection can be accomplished!' That is much. A

marvellous thing in this age of science, and the scepticism that

knowledge makes. But life and resurrection are themselves but items in

what may be won by the accomplishment of this Great Experiment. Imagine

what it will be for the world of thought—the true world of human

progress—the veritable road to the Stars, the itur ad astra of the

Ancients—if there can come back to us out of the unknown past one who

can yield to us the lore stored in the great Library of Alexandria, and

lost in its consuming flames. Not only history can be set right, and

the teachings of science made veritable from their beginnings; but we

can be placed on the road to the knowledge of lost arts, lost learning,

lost sciences, so that our feet may tread on the indicated path to their

ultimate and complete restoration. Why, this woman can tell us what the

world was like before what is called 'the Flood'; can give us the origin

of that vast astounding myth; can set the mind back to the consideration

of things which to us now seem primeval, but which were old stories

before the days of the Patriarchs. But this is not the end! No, not

even the beginning! If the story of this woman be all that we think—

which some of us most firmly believe; if her powers and the restoration

of them prove to be what we expect, why, then we may yet achieve a

knowledge beyond what our age has ever known—beyond what is believed

today possible for the children of men. If indeed this resurrection can

be accomplished, how can we doubt the old knowledge, the old magic, the

old belief! And if this be so, we must take it that the 'Ka' of this

great and learned Queen has won secrets of more than mortal worth from

her surroundings amongst the stars. This woman in her life voluntarily

went down living to the grave, and came back again, as we learn from the

records in her tomb; she chose to die her mortal death whilst young, so

that at her resurrection in another age, beyond a trance of countless

magnitude, she might emerge from her tomb in all the fulness and

splendour of her youth and power. Already we have evidence that though

her body slept in patience through those many centuries, her

intelligence never passed away, that her resolution never flagged, that

her will remained supreme; and, most important of all, that her memory

was unimpaired. Oh, what possibilities are there in the coming of such

a being into our midst! One whose history began before the concrete

teaching of our Bible; whose experiences were antecedent to the

formulation of the Gods of Greece; who can link together the Old and the

New, Earth and Heaven, and yield to the known worlds of thought and

physical existence the mystery of the Unknown—of the Old World in its

youth, and of Worlds beyond our ken!”

He paused, almost overcome. Margaret had taken his hand when he spoke

of her being so dear to him, and held it hard. As he spoke she

continued to hold it. But there came over her face that change which I

had so often seen of late; that mysterious veiling of her own

personality which gave me the subtle sense of separation from her. In

his impassioned vehemence her father did not notice; but when he stopped

she seemed all at once to be herself again. In her glorious eyes came

the added brightness of unshed tears; and with a gesture of passionate

love and admiration, she stooped and kissed her father's hand. Then,

turning to me, she too spoke:

"Malcolm, you have spoken of the deaths that came from the poor Queen;

or rather that justly came from meddling with her arrangements and

thwarting her purpose. Do you not think that, in putting it as you have

done, you have been unjust? Who would not have done just as she did?

Remember she was fighting for her life! Ay, and for more than her life!

For life, and love, and all the glorious possibilities of that dim

future in the unknown world of the North which had such enchanting hopes

for her! Do you not think that she, with all the learning of her time,

and with all the great and resistless force of her mighty nature, had

hopes of spreading in a wider way the lofty aspirations of her soul!

That she hoped to bring to the conquering of unknown worlds, and using

to the advantage of her people, all that she had won from sleep and

death and time; all of which might and could have been frustrated by the

ruthless hand of an assassin or a thief. Were it you, in such case

would you not struggle by all means to achieve the object of your life

and hope; whose possibilities grew and grew in the passing of those

endless years? Can you think that that active brain was at rest during

all those weary centuries, whilst her free soul was flitting from world

to world amongst the boundless regions of the stars? Had these stars in

their myriad and varied life no lessons for her; as they have had for us

since we followed the glorious path which she and her people marked for

us, when they sent their winged imaginations circling amongst the lamps

of the night!”

Here she paused. She too was overcome, and the welling tears ran down

her cheeks. I was myself more moved than I can say. This was indeed my

Margaret; and in the consciousness of her presence my heart leapt. Out

of my happiness came boldness, and I dared to say now what I had feared

would be impossible: something which would call the attention of Mr.

Trelawny to what I imagined was the dual existence of his daughter. As

I took Margaret's hand in mine and kissed it, I said to her father:

"Why, sir! she couldn't speak more eloquently if the very spirit of

Queen Tera was with her to animate her and suggest thoughts!"

Mr. Trelawny's answer simply overwhelmed me with surprise. It

manifested to me that he too had gone through just such a process of

thought as my own.

"And what if it was; if it is! I know well that the spirit of her

mother is within her. If in addition there be the spirit of that great

and wondrous Queen, then she would be no less dear to me, but doubly

dear! Do not have fear for her, Malcolm Ross; at least have no more

fear than you may have for the rest of us!" Margaret took up the theme,

speaking so quickly that her words seemed a continuation of her

father's, rather than an interruption of them.

"Have no special fear for me, Malcolm. Queen Tera knows, and will offer

us no harm. I know it! I know it, as surely as I am lost in the depth

of my own love for you!"

There was something in her voice so strange to me that I looked quickly

into her eyes. They were bright as ever, but veiled to my seeing the

inward thought behind them as are the eyes of a caged lion.

Then the two other men came in, and the subject changed.

Chapter XVIII

The Lesson of the "Ka"

That night we all went to bed early. The next night would be an anxious

one, and Mr. Trelawny thought that we should all be fortified with what

sleep we could get. The day, too, would be full of work. Everything in

connection with the Great Experiment would have to be gone over, so that

at the last we might not fail from any unthought-of flaw in our working.

We made, of course, arrangements for summoning aid in case such should

be needed; but I do not think that any of us had any real apprehension

of danger. Certainly we had no fear of such danger from violence as we

had had to guard against in London during Mr. Trelawny's long trance.

For my own part I felt a strange sense of relief in the matter. I had

accepted Mr. Trelawny's reasoning that if the Queen were indeed such as

we surmised—such as indeed we now took for granted—there would not be

any opposition on her part; for we were carrying out her own wishes to

the very last. So far I was at ease—far more at ease than earlier in

the day I should have thought possible; but there were other sources of

trouble which I could not blot out from my mind. Chief amongst them was

Margaret's strange condition. If it was indeed that she had in her own

person a dual existence, what might happen when the two existences

became one? Again, and again, and again I turned this matter over in my

mind, till I could have shrieked out in nervous anxiety. It was no

consolation to me to remember that Margaret was herself satisfied, and

her father acquiescent. Love is, after all, a selfish thing; and it

throws a black shadow on anything between which and the light it stands.

I seemed to hear the hands go round the dial of the clock; I saw

darkness turn to gloom, and gloom to grey, and grey to light without

pause or hindrance to the succession of my miserable feelings. At last,

when it was decently possible without the fear of disturbing others, I

got up. I crept along the passage to find if all was well with the

others; for we had arranged that the door of each of our rooms should be

left slightly open so that any sound of disturbance would be easily and

distinctly heard.

One and all slept; I could hear the regular breathing of each, and my

heart rejoiced that this miserable night of anxiety was safely passed.

As I knelt in my own room in a burst of thankful prayer, I knew in the

depths of my own heart the measure of my fear. I found my way out of

the house, and went down to the water by the long stairway cut in the

rock. A swim in the cool bright sea braced my nerves and made me my old

self again.

As I came back to the top of the steps I could see the bright sunlight,

rising from behind me, turning the rocks across the bay to glittering

gold. And yet I felt somehow disturbed. It was all too bright; as it

sometimes is before the coming of a storm. As I paused to watch it, I

felt a soft hand on my shoulder; and, turning, found Margaret close to

me; Margaret as bright and radiant as the morning glory of the sun! It

was my own Margaret this time! My old Margaret, without alloy of any

other; and I felt that, at least, this last and fatal day was well

begun.

But alas! the joy did not last. When we got back to the house from a

stroll around the cliffs, the same old routine of yesterday was resumed:

gloom and anxiety, hope, high spirits, deep depression, and apathetic

aloofness.

But it was to be a day of work; and we all braced ourselves to it with

an energy which wrought its own salvation.

After breakfast we all adjourned to the cave, where Mr. Trelawny went

over, point by point, the position of each item of our paraphernalia.

He explained as he went on why each piece was so placed. He had with

him the great rools of paper with the measured plans and the signs and

drawings which he had had made from his own and Corbeck's rough notes.

As he had told us, these contained the whole of the hieroglyphics on

walls and ceilings and floor of the tomb in the Valley of the Sorcerer.

Even had not the measurements, made to scale, recorded the position of

each piece of furniture, we could have eventually placed them by a study

of the cryptic writings and symbols.

Mr. Trelawny explained to us certain other things, not laid down on the

chart. Such as, for instance, that the hollowed part of the table was

exactly fitted to the bottom of the Magic Coffer, which was therefore

intended to be placed on it. The respective legs of this table were

indicated by differently shaped uraei outlined on the floor, the head of

each being extended in the direction of the similar uraeus twined round

the Also that the mummy, when laid on the raised portion in the bottom

of the sarcophagus, seemingly made to fit the form, would lie head to

the West and feet to the East, thus receiving the natural earth

currents. “If this be intended,” he said, “as I presume it is, I gather

that the force to be used has something to do with magnetism or

electricity, or both. It may be, of course, that some other force,

such, for instance, as that emanating from radium, is to be employed. I

have experimented with the latter, but only in such small quantity as I

could obtain; but so far as I can ascertain the stone of the Coffer is

absolutely impervious to its influence. There must be some such

unsusceptible substances in nature. Radium does not seemingly manifest

itself when distributed through pitchblende; and there are doubtless

other such substances in which it can be imprisoned. Possibly these may

belong to that class of "inert" elements discovered or isolated by Sir

William Ramsay. It is therefore possible that in this Coffer, made from

an aerolite and therefore perhaps containing some element unknown in our

world, may be imprisoned some mighty power which is to be released on

its opening."

This appeared to be an end of this branch of the subject; but as he

still kept the fixed look of one who is engaged in a theme we all waited

in silence. After a pause he went on:

"There is one thing which has up to now, I confess, puzzled me. It may

not be of prime importance; but in a matter like this, where all is

unknown, we must take it that everything is important. I cannot think

that in a matter worked out with such extraordinary scrupulosity such a

thing should be overlooked. As you may see by the ground-plan of the

tomb the sarcophagus stands near the north wall, with the Magic Coffer

to the south of it. The space covered by the former is left quite bare

of symbol or ornamentation of any kind. At the first glance this would

seem to imply that the drawings had been made after the sarcophagus had

been put into its place. But a more minute examination will show that

the symbolisation on the floor is so arranged that a definite effect is

produced. See, here the writings run in correct order as though they

had jumped across the gap. It is only from certain effects that it

becomes clear that there is a meaning of some kind. What that meaning

may be is what we want to know. Look at the top and bottom of the

vacant space, which lies West and East corresponding to the head and

foot of the sarcophagus. In both are duplications of the same

symbolisation, but so arranged that the parts of each one of them are

integral portions of some other writing running crosswise. It is only

when we get a coup d'oeil from either the head or the foot that you

recognise that there are symbolisations. See! they are in triplicate at

the corners and the centre of both top and bottom. In every case there

is a sun cut in half by the line of the sarcophagus, as by the horizon.

Close behind each of these and faced away from it, as though in some way

dependent on it, is the vase which in hieroglyphic writing symbolises

the heart—'Ab' the Egyptians called it. Beyond each of these again is

the figure of a pair of widespread arms turned upwards from the elbow;

this is the determinative of the 'Ka' or 'Double'. But its relative

position is different at top and bottom. At the head of the sarcophagus

the top of the 'Ka' is turned towards the mouth of the vase, but at the

foot the extended arms point away from it.

"The symbolisation seems to mean that during the passing of the Sun from

West to East—from sunset to sunrise, or through the Under World,

otherwise night—the Heart, which is material even in the tomb and cannot

leave it, simply revolves, so that it can always rest on 'Ra' the Sun-God, the origin of all good; but that the Double, which represents the active principle, goes whither it will, the same by night as by day.

If this be correct it is a warning—a caution—a reminder that the consciousness of the mummy does not rest but is to be reckoned with.

"Or it may be intended to convey that after the particular night of the resurrection, the 'Ka' would leave the heart altogether, thus typifying that in her resurrection the Queen would be restored to a lower and purely physical existence. In such case what would become of her memory and the experiences of her wide-wandering soul? The chiefest value of her resurrection would be lost to the world! This, however, does not alarm me. It is only guess-work after all, and is contradictory to the intellectual belief of the Egyptian theology, that the 'Ka' is an essential portion of humanity." He paused and we all waited. The silence was broken by Doctor Winchester:

"But would not all this imply that the Queen feared intrusion of her tomb?" Mr. Trelawny smiled as he answered:

"My dear sir, she was prepared for it. The grave robber is no modern application of endeavour; he was probably known in the Queen's own dynasty. Not only was she prepared for intrusion, but, as shown in several ways, she expected it. The hiding of the lamps in the serdab, and the institution of the avenging 'treasurer' shows that there was defence, positive as well as negative. Indeed, from the many indications afforded in the clues laid out with the most consummated thought, we may almost gather that she entertained it as a possibility that others—like ourselves, for instance—might in all seriousness undertake the work which she had made ready for her own hands when the time should have come. This very matter that I have been speaking of is an instance. The clue is intended for seeing eyes!"

Again we were silent. It was Margaret who spoke:

"Father, may I have that chart? I should like to study it during the day!"

"Certainly, my dear!" answered Mr. Trelawny heartily, as he handed it to her. He resumed his instructions in a different tone, a more matter-of-fact one suitable to a practical theme which had no mystery about it:

"I think you had better all understand the working of the electric light in case any sudden contingency should arise. I dare say you have noticed that we have a complete supply in every part of the house, so that there need not be a dark corner anywhere. This I had specially arranged. It is worked by a set of turbines moved by the flowing and ebbing tide, after the manner of the turbines at Niagara. I hope by this means to nullify accident and to have without fail a full supply ready at any time. Come with me and I will explain the system of circuits, and point out to you the taps and the fuses." I could not but

notice, as we went with him all over the house, how absolutely complete

the system was, and how he had guarded himself against any disaster that

human thought could foresee.

But out of the very completeness came a fear! In such an enterprise as

ours the bounds of human thought were but narrow. Beyond it lay the

vast of Divine wisdom, and Divine power!

When we came back to the cave, Mr. Trelawny took up another theme:

"We have now to settle definitely the exact hour at which the Great

Experiment is to be made. So far as science and mechanism go, if the

preparations are complete, all hours are the same. But as we have to

deal with preparations made by a woman of extraordinarily subtle mind,

and who had full belief in magic and had a cryptic meaning in

everything, we should place ourselves in her position before deciding.

It is now manifest that the sunset has an important place in the

arrangements. As those suns, cut so mathematically by the edge of the

sarcophagus, were arranged of full design, we must take our cue from

this. Again, we find all along that the number seven has had an

important bearing on every phase of the Queen's thought and reasoning

and action. The logical result is that the seventh hour after sunset

was the time fixed on. This is borne out by the fact that on each of

the occasions when action was taken in my house, this was the time

chosen. As the sun sets tonight in Cornwall at eight, our hour is to

be three in the morning!" He spoke in a matter-of-fact way, though

with great gravity; but there was nothing of mystery in his word or

manner. Still, we were all impressed to a remarkable degree. I could

see this in the other men by the pallor that came on some of their

faces, and by the stillness and unquestioning silence with which the

decision was received. The only one who remained in any way at ease was

Margaret, who had lapsed into one of her moods of abstraction, but who

seemed to wake up to a note of gladness. Her father, who was watching

her intently, smiled; her mood was to him a direct confirmation of his

theory.

For myself I was almost overcome. The definite fixing of the hour

seemed like the voice of Doom. When I think of it now, I can realise

how a condemned man feels at his sentence, or at the sounding of the

last hour he is to hear.

There could be no going back now! We were in the hands of God!

The hands of God … ! And yet … ! What other forces were

arrayed? … What would become of us all, poor atoms of earthly dust

whirled in the wind which comesth whence and goeth whither no man may

know. It was not for myself … Margaret … !

I was recalled by Mr. Trelawny's firm voice:

"Now we shall see to the lamps and finish our preparations."

Accordingly we set to work, and under his supervision made ready the

Egyptian lamps, seeing that they were well filled with the cedar oil,

and that the wicks were adjusted and in good order. We lighted and

tested them one by one, and left them ready so that they would light at

once and evenly. When this was done we had a general look round; and

fixed all in readiness for our work at night.

All this had taken time, and we were I think all surprised when as we

emerged from the cave we heard the great clock in the hall chime four.

We had a late lunch, a thing possible without trouble in the present

state of our commissariat arrangements. Afte it, by Mr. Trelawny's

advice, we separated; each to prepare in our own way for the strain of

the coming night. Margaret looked pale and somewhat overwrought, so I

advised her to lie down and try to sleep. She promised that she would.

The abstraction which had been upon her fitfully all day lifted for the

time; with all her old sweetness and loving delicacy she kissed me

good-bye for the present! With the sense of happiness which this gave

me I went out for a walk on the cliffs. I did not want to think; and I

had an instinctive feeling that fresh air and God's sunlight, and the

myriad beauties of the works of His hand would be the best preparation

of fortitude for what was to come.

When I got back, all the party were assembling for a late tea. Coming

fresh from the exhilaration of nature, it struck me as almost comic that

we, who were nearing the end of so strange—almost monstrous—an

undertaking, should be yet bound by the needs and habits of our lives.

All the men of the party were grave; the time of seclusion, even if it

had given them rest, had also given opportunity for thought. Margaret

was bright, almost buoyant; but I missed about her something of her

usual spontaneity. Towards myself there was a shadowy air of reserve,

which brought back something of my suspicion. When tea was over, she

went out of the room; but returned in a minute with the roll of drawing

which she had taken with her earlier in the day. Coming close to Mr.

Trelawny, she said:

"Father, I have been carefully considering what you said today about

the hidden meaning of those suns and hearts and 'Ka's', and I have been

examining the drawings again."

"And with what result, my child?" asked Mr. Trelawny eagerly.

"There is another reading possible!"

"And that?" His voice was now tremulous with anxiety. Margaret spoke

with a strange ring in her voice; a ring that cannot be, unless there is

the consciousness of truth behind it:

"It means that at the sunset the 'Ka' is to enter the 'Ab'; and it is

only at the sunrise that it will leave it!"

"Go on!" said her father hoarsely.

"It means that for this night the Queen's Double, which is otherwise

free, will remain in her heart, which is mortal and cannot leave its

prison-place in the mummy-shrouding. It means that when the sun has

dropped into the sea, Queen Tera will cease to exist as a conscious

power, till sunrise; unless the Great Experiment can recall her to

waking life. It means that there will be nothing whatever for you or

others to fear from her in such way as we have all cause to remember.

Whatever change may come from the working of the Great Experiment, there

can come none from the poor, helpless, dead woman who has waited all

those centuries for this night; who has given up to the coming hour all

the freedom of eternity, won in the old way, in hope of a new life in a

new world such as she longed for … !" She stopped suddenly. As she

had gone on speaking there had come with her words a strange pathetic,

almost pleading, tone which touched me to the quick. As she stopped, I

could see, before she turned away her head, that her eyes were full of

tears.

For once the heart of her father did not respond to her feeling. He

looked exultant, but with a grim masterfulness which reminded me of the

set look of his stern face as he had lain in the trance. He did not

offer any consolation to his daughter in her sympathetic pain. He only

said:

"We may test the accuracy of your surmise, and of her feeling, when the

time comes!" Having said so, he went up the stone stairway and into his

own room. Margaret's face had a troubled look as she gazed after him.

Strangely enough her trouble did not as usual touch me to the quick.

When Mr. Trelawny had gone, silence reigned. I do not think that any of

us wanted to talk. Presently Margaret went to her room, and I went out

on the terrace over the sea. The fresh air and the beauty of all before

helped to restore the good spirits which I had known earlier in the day.

Presently i felt myself actually rejoicing in the belief that the danger

which I had feared from the Queen's violence on the coming night was

obviated. I believed in Margaret's belief so thoroughly that it did not

occur to me to dispute her reasoning. In a lofty frame of mind, and

with less anxiety than I had felt for days, I went to my room and lay

down on the sofa.

I was awaked by Corbeck calling to me, hurriedly:

"Come down to the cave as quickly as you can. Mr. Trelawny wants to see

us all there at once. Hurry!"

I jumped up and ran down to the cave. All were there except Margaret,

who came immediately after me carrying Silvio in her arms. When the cat

saw his old enemy he struggled to get down; but Margaret held him fast

and soothed him. I looked at my watch. It was close to eight.

When Margaret was with us her father said directly, with a quiet

insistence which was new to me:

"You believe, Margaret, that Queen Tera has voluntarily undertaken to

give up her freedom for this night? To become a mummy and nothing more,

till the Experiment has been completed? To be content that she shall be

powerless under all and any circumstances until after all is over and

the act of resurrection has been accomplished, or the effort has

failed?" After a pause Margaret answered in a low voice:

"Yes!"

In the pause her whole being, appearance, expression, voice, manner had

changed. Even Silvio noticed it, and with a violent effort wriggled away

from her arms; she did not seem to notice the act. I expected that the

cat, when he had achieved his freedom, would have attacked the mummy;

but on this occasion he did not. He seemed too cowed to approach it.

He shrunk away, and with a piteous "miaou" came over and rubbed himself

against my ankles. I took him up in my arms, and he nestled there

content. Mr. Trelawny spoke again:

"You are sure of what you say! You believe it with all your soul?"

Margaret's face had lost the abstracted look; it now seemed illuminated

with the devotion of one to whom is given to speak of great things. She

answered in a voice which, though quiet, vibrated with conviction:

"I know it! My knowledge is beyond belief!" Mr. Trelawny spoke again:

"Then you are so sure, that were you Queen Tera herself, you would be

willing to prove it in any way that I might suggest?"

"Yes, any way!" the answer rang out fearlessly. He spoke again, in a

voice in which was no note of doubt:

"Even in the abandonment of your Familiar to death—to annihilation."

She paused, and I could see that she suffered—suffered horribly. There

was in her eyes a hunted look, which no man can, unmoved, see in the

eyes of his beloved. I was about to interrupt, when her father's eyes,

glancing round with a fierce determination, met mine. I stood silent,

almost spellbound; so also the other men. Something was going on before

us which we did not understand!

With a few long strides Mr. Trelawny went to the west side of the cave

and tore back the shutter which obscured the window. The cool air blew

in, and the sunlight streamed over them both, for Margaret was now by

his side. He pointed to where the sun was sinking into the sea in a

halo of golden fire, and his face was as set as flint. In a voice whose

absolute uncompromising hardness I shall hear in my ears at times till

my dying day, he said:

"Choose! Speak! When the sun has dipped below the sea, it will be too

late!" The glory of the dying sun seemed to light up Margaret's face,

till it shone as if lit from within by a noble light, as she answered:

"Even that!"

Then stepping over to where the mummy cat stood on the little table, she

placed her hand on it. She had now left the sunlight, and the shadows

looked dark and deep over her. In a clear voice she said:

"Were I Tera, I would say 'Take all I have! This night is for the Gods

alone!'"

As she spoke the sun dipped, and the cold shadow suddenly fell on us.

We all stood still for a while. Silvio jumped from my arms and ran over

to his mistress, rearing himself up against her dress as if asking to be

lifted. He took no notice whatever of the mummy now.

Margaret was glorious with all her wonted sweetness as she said sadly:

“The sun is down, Father! Shall any of us see it again? The night of nights is come!”

Chapter XIX

The Great Experiment

If any evidence had been wanted of how absolutely one and all of us had

come to believe in the spiritual existence of the Egyptian Queen, it

would have been found in the change which n a few minutes had been

effected in us by the statement of voluntary negation made, we all

believed, through Margaret. Despite the coming of the fearful ordeal,

the sense of which it was impossible to forget, we looked and acted as

though a great relief had come to us. We had indeed lived in such a

state of terrorism during the days when Mr. Trelawny was lying in a

trance that the feeling had bitten deeply into us. No one knows till he

has experienced it, what it is to be in constant dreadof some unknown

danger which may come at any time and in any form.

The change was manifested in different ways, according to each nature.

Margaret was sad. Doctor Winchester was in high spirits, and keenly observant; the process of thought which had served as an antidote to fear, being now relieved from this duty, added to his intellectual enthusiasm. Mr. Corbeck seemed to be in a retrospective rather than a speculative mood. I was myself rather inclined to be gay; the relief from certain anxiety regarding Margaret was sufficient for me for the time.

As to Mr. Trelawny he seemed less changed than any. Perhaps this was only natural, as he had had in his mind the intention for so many years of doing that in which we were tonight engaged, that any event connected with it could only seem to him as an episode, a step to the end. His was that commanding nature which looks so to the end of an undertaking that all else is of secondary importance. Even now, though his terrible sternness relaxed under the relief from the strain, he

never flagged nor faltered for a moment in his purpose. He asked us men

to come with him; and going to the hall we presently managed to lower

into the cave an oak table, fairly long and not too wide, which stood

against the wall in the hall. This we placed under the strong cluster

of electric lights in the middle of the cave. Margaret looked on for a

while; then all at once her face blanched, and in an agitated voice she

said:

"What are you going to do, Father?"

"To unroll the mummy of the cat! Queen Tera will not need her Familiar

tonight. If she should want him, it might be dangerous to us; so we

shall make him safe. You are not alarmed, dear?"

"Oh no!" she answered quickly. "But I was thinking of my Silvio, and

how I should feel if he had been the mummy that was to be unswathed!"

Mr. Trelawny got knives and scissors ready, and placed the cat on the

table. It was a grim beginning to our work; and it made my heart sink

when I thought of what might happen in that lonely house in the

mid-gloom of the night. The sense of loneliness and isolation from the

world was increased by the moaning of the wind which had now risen

ominously, and by the beating of waves on the rocks below. But we had

too grave a task before us to be swayed by external manifestations: the

unrolling of the mummy began.

There was an incredible number of bandages; and the tearing sound —they

being stuck fast to each other by bitumen and gums and spices— and the

little cloud of red pungent dust that arose, pressed on the senses of

all of us. As the last wrappings came away, we saw the animal seated

before us. He was all hunkered up; his hair and teeth and claws were

complete. The eyes were closed, but the eyelids had not the fierce look

which I expected. The whiskers had been pressed down on the side of the

face by the bandaging; but when the pressure ws taken away they stood

out, just as they would have done in life. He was a magnificent

creature, a tiger-cat of great size. But as we looked at him, our first

glance of admiration changed to one of fear, and a shudder ran through

each one of us; for here was a confirmation of the fears which we had

endured.

His mouth and his claws were smeared with the dry, red stains of recent

blood!

Doctor Winchester was the first to recover; blood in itself had small

disturbing quality for him. He had taken out his magnifying-glass and

was examining the stains on the cat’s mouth. Mr. Trelawny breathed

loudly, as though a strain had been taken from him.

“It is as I expected,” he said. “This promises well for what is to follow.”

By this time Doctor Winchester was looking at the red stained paws. “As I expected!” he said. “He has seven claws, too!” Opening his pocket-book, he took out the piece of blotting-paper marked by Silvio’s claws, on which was also marked in pencil a diagram of the cuts made on Mr. Trelawny’s wrist. He placed the paper under the mummy cat’s paw.

The marks fitted exactly.

When we had carefully examined the cat, finding, however, nothing strange about it but its wonderful preservation, Mr. Trelawny lifted it from the table. Margaret started forward, crying out:

“Take care, Father! Take care! He may injure you!”

“Not now, my dear!” he answered as he moved towards the stairway. Her

face fell. “Where are you going?” she asked in a faint voice.

“To the kitchen,” he answered. “Fire will take away all danger for the

future; even an astral body cannot materialise from ashes!” He signed

to us to follow him. Margaret turned away with a sob. I went to her;

but she motioned me back and whispered:

“No, no! Go with the others. Father may want you. Oh! it seems like

murder! The poor Queen’s pet … !” The tears were dropping from

under the fingers that covered her eyes.

In the kitchen was a fire of wood ready laid. To this Mr. Trelawny

applied a match; in a few seconds the kindling had caught and the flames

leaped. When the fire was solidly ablaze, he threw the body of the cat

into it. For a few seconds it lay a dark mass amidst the flames, and

the room was rank with the smell of burning hair. Then the dry body

caught fire too. The inflammable substances used in embalming became

new fuel, and the flames roared. A few minutes of fierce conflagration;

and then we breathed freely. Queen Tera's Familiar was no more!

When we went back to the cave we found Margaret sitting in the dark.

She had switched off the electric light, and only a faint glow of the

evening light came through the narrow openings. Her father went quickly

over to her and put his arms round her in a loving protective way. She

laid her head on his shoulder for a minute and seemed comforted.

Presently she called to me:

"Malcolm, turn up the light!" I carried out her orders, and could see

that, though she had been crying, her eyes were now dry. Her father saw

it too and looked glad. He said to us in a grave tone:

"Now we had better prepare for our great work. It will not do to leave

anything to the last!" Margaret must have had a suspicion of what was

coming, for it was with a sinking voice that she asked:

"What are you going to do now?" Mr. Trelawny too must have had a

suspicion of her feelings, for he answered in a low tone:

"To unroll the mummy of Queen Tera!" She came close to him and said

pleadingly in a whisper:

"Father, you are not going to unswathe her! All you men … ! And in

the glare of light!"

"But why not, my dear?"

"Just think, Father, a woman! All alone! In such a way! In such a

place! Oh! it's cruel, cruel!" She was manifestly much overcome. Her

cheeks were flaming red, and her eyes were full of indignant tears. Her

father saw her distress; and, sympathising with it, began to comfort

her. I was moving off; but he signed to me to stay. I took it that

after the usual manner of men he wanted help on such an occasion, and

manlike wished to throw on someone else the task of dealing with a

woman in indignant distress. However, he began to appeal first to her

reason:

"Not a woman, dear; a mummy! She has been dead nearly five thousand

years!"

"What does that matter? Sex is not a matter of years! A woman is a

woman, if she had been dead five thousand centuries! And you expect her

to arise out of that long sleep! It could not be real death, if she is

to rise out of it! You have led me to believe that she will come alive

when the Coffer is opened!"

"I did, my dear; and I believe it! But if it isn't death that has been

the matter with her all these years, it is something uncommonly like it.

Then again, just think; it was men who embalmed her. They didn't have

women's rights or lady doctors in ancient Egypt, my dear! And besides,"

he went on more freely, seeing that she was accepting his argument, if

not yielding to it, "we men are accustomed to such things. Corbeck and

I have unrolled a hundred mummies; and there were as many women as men

amongst them. Doctor Winchester in his work has had to deal with women

as well of men, till custome has made him think nothing of sex. Even

Ross has in his work as a barrister …" He stopped suddenly.

"You were going to help too!" she said to me, with an indignant look.

I said nothing; I thought silence was best. Mr. Trelawny went on

hurriedly; I could see that he was glad of interruption, for the part of

his argument concerning a barrister's work was becoming decidedly weak:

"My child, you will be with us yourself. Would we do anything which

would hurt or offend you? Come now! be reasonable! We are not at a

pleasure party. We are all grave men, entering gravely on an experiment

which may unfold the wisdom of old times, and enlarge human knowledge

indefinitely; which may put the minds of men on new tracks of thought

and research. An experiment," as he went on his voice deepened, "which

may be fraught with death to any one of us—to us all! We know from what

has been, that there are, or may be, vast and unknown dangers ahead of

us, of which none in the house today may ever see the end. Take it, my

child, that we are not acting lightly; but with all the gravity of

deeply earnest men! Besides, my dear, whatever feelings you or any of

us may have on the subject, it is necessary for the success of the

experiment to unswathe her. I think that under any circumstances it

would be necessary to remove the wrappings before she became again a

live human being instead of a spiritualised corpse with an astral body.

Were her original intention carried out, and did she come to new life

within her mummy wrappings, it might be to exchange a coffin for a

grave! She would die the death of the buried alive! But now, when she

has voluntarily abandoned for the time her astral power, there can be no

doubt on the subject."

Margaret's face cleared. "All right, Father!" she said as she kissed

him. "But oh! it seems a horrible indignity to a Queen, and a woman."

I was moving away to the staircase when she called me:

"Where are you going?" I came back and took her hand and stroked it as

I answered:

"I shall come back when the unrolling is over!" She looked at me long,

and a faint suggestion of a smile came over her face as she said:

"Perhaps you had better stay, too! It may be useful to you in your work

as a barrister!" She smiled out as she met my eyes: but in an instant she changed. Her face grew grave, and deadly white. In a far away voice she said:

"Father is right! It is a terrible occasion; we need all to be serious over it. But all the same—nay, for that very reason you had better stay, Malcolm! You may be glad, later on, that you were present tonight!"

My heart sank down, down, at her words; but I thought it better to say

nothing. Fear was stalking openly enough amongst us already!

By this time Mr. Trelawny, assisted by Mr. Corbeck and Doctor Winchester, had raised the lid of the ironstone sarcophagus which contained the mummy of the Queen. It was a large one; but it was none

too big. The mummy was both long and broad and high; and was of such

weight that it was no easy task, even for the four of us, to lift it out. Under Mr. Trelawny's direction we laid it out on the table prepared for it.

Then, and then only, did the full horror of the whole thing burst upon me! There, in the full glare of the light, the whole material and sordid side of death seemed staringly real. The outer wrappings, torn and loosened by rude touch, and with the colour either darkened by dust or worn light by friction, seemed creased as by rough treatment; the jagged edges of the wrapping-cloths looked fringed; the painting was patchy, and the varnish chipped. The coverings were evidently many, for the bulk was great. But through all, showed that unhidable human figure, which seems to look more horrible when partially concealed than at any other time. What was before us was Death, and nothing else. All the romance and sentiment of fancy had disappeared. The two elder men,

enthusiasts who had often done such work, were not disconcerted; and

Doctor Winchester seemed to hold himself in a business-like attitude, as

if before the operating-table. But I felt low-spirited, and miserable,

and ashamed; and besides I was pained and alarmed by Margaret's ghastly

pallor.

Then the work began. The unrolling of the mummy cat had prepared me

somewhat for it; but this was so much larger, and so infinitely more

elaborate, that it seemed a different thing. Moreover, in addition to

the ever present sense of death and humanity, there was a feeling of

something finer in all this. The cat had been embalmed with coarser

materials; here, all, when once the outer coverings were removed, was

more delicately done. It seemed as if only the finest gums and spices

had been used in this embalming. But there were the same surroundings,

the same attendant red dust and pungent presence of bitumen; there was

the same sound of rending which marked the tearing away of the bandages.

There were an enormous number of these, and their bulk when opened was

great. As the men unrolled them, I grew more and more excited. I did

not take a part in it myself; Margaret had looked at me gratefully as I

drew back. We clasped hands, and held each other hard. As the

unrolling went on, the wrappings became finer, and the smell less laden

with bitumen, but more pungent. We all, I think, began to feel it as

though it caught or touched us in some special way. This, however, did

not interfere with the work; it went on uninterruptedly. Some of the

inner wrappings bore symbols or pictures. These were done sometimes

wholly in pale green colour, sometimes in many colours; but always with

a prevalence of green. Now and again Mr. Trelawny or Mr. Corbeck would

point out some special drawing before laying the bandage on the pile

behind them, which kept growing to a monstrous height.

At last we knew that the wrappings were coming to an end. Already the

proportions were reduced to those of a normal figure of the manifest

height of the Queen, who was more than average height. And as the end

drew nearer, so Margaret's pallor grew; and her heart beat more and more

wildly, till her breast heaved in a way that frightened me.

Just as her father was taking away the last of the bandages, he happened

to look up and caught the pained and anxious look of her pale face. He

paused, and taking her concern to be as to the outrage on modesty, said

in a comforting way:

"Do not be uneasy, dear! See! there is nothing to harm you. The Queen

has on a robe.—Ay, and a royal robe, too!"

The wrapping was a wide piece the whole length of the body. It being

removed, a profusely full robe of white linen had appeared, covering the

body from the throat to the feet.

And such linen! We all bent over to look at it.

Margaret lost her concern, in her woman's interest in fine stuff. Then

the rest of us looked with admiration; for surely such linen was never

seen by the eyes of our age. It was as fine as the finest silk. But

never was spun or woven silk which lay in such gracious folds, constrict

though they were by the close wrappings of the mummy cloth, and fixed

into hardness by the passing of thousands of years.

Round the neck it was delicately embroidered in pure gold with tiny

sprays of sycamore; and round the feet, similarly worked, was an endless

line of lotus plants of unequal height, and with all the graceful

abandon of natural growth.

Across the body, but manifestly not surrounding it, was a girdle of

jewels. A wondrous girdle, which shone and glowed with all the forms

and phases and colours of the sky!

The buckle was a great yellow stone, round of outline, deep and curved,

as if a yielding globe had been pressed down. It shone and glowed, as

though a veritable sun lay within; the rays of its light seemed to

strike out and illumine all round. Flanking it were two great moonstones

of lesser size, whose glowing, beside the glory of the sunstone, was

like the silvery sheen of moonlight.

And then on either side, linked by golden clasps of exquisite shape, was

a line of flaming jewels, of which the colours seemed to glow. Each of

these stones seemed to hold a living star, which twinkled in every phase

of changing light.

Margaret raised her hands in ecstasy. She bent over to examine more

closely; but suddenly drew back and stood fully erect at her grand

height. She seemed to speak with the conviction of absolute knowledge

as she said:

“That is no cerement! It was no meant for the clothing of death! It is

a marriage robe!”

Mr. Trelawny leaned over and touched the linen robe. He lifted a fold

at the neck, and I knew from the quick intake of his breath that

something had surprised him. He lifted yet a little more; and then he,

too, stood back and pointed, saying:

“Margaret is right! That dress is not intended to be worn by the dead!

See! her figure is not robed in it. It is but laid upon her.” He

lifted the zone of jewels and handed it to Margaret. Then with both

hands he raised the ample robe, and laid it across the arms which she

extended in a natural impulse. Things of such beauty were too precious

to be handled with any but the greatest care.

We all stood awed at the beauty of the figure which, save for the face

cloth, now lay completely nude before us. Mr. Trelawny bent over, and

with hands that trembled slightly, raised this linen cloth which was of

the same fineness as the robe. As he stood back and the whole glorious

beauty of the Queen was revealed, I felt a rush of shame sweep over me.

It was not right that we should be there, gazing with irreverent eyes on

such unclad beauty: it was indecent; it was almost sacrilegious! And

yet the white wonder of that beautiful form was something to dream of.

It was not like death at all; it was like a statue carven in ivory by

the hand of a Praxiteles. There was nothing of that horrible shrinkage

which death seems to effect in a moment. There was none of the wrinkled

toughness which seems to be a leading characteristic of most mummies.

There was not the shrunken attenuation of a body dried in the sand, as I

had seen before in museums. All the pores of the body seemed to have

been preserved in some wonderful way. The flesh was full and round, as

in a living person; and the skin was as smooth as satin. The colour

seemed extraordinary. It was like ivory, new ivory; except where the

right arm, with shattered, bloodstained wrist and missing hand had lain

bare to exposure in the sarcophagus for so many tens of centuries.

With a womanly impulse; with a mouth that drooped with pity, with eyes

that flashed with anger, and cheeks that flamed, Margaret threw over the

body the beautiful robe which lay across her arm. Only the face was

then to be seen. This was more startling even than the body, for it

seemed not dead, but alive. The eyelids were closed; but the long,

black, curling lashes lay over on the cheeks. The nostrils, set in grave pride, seemed to have the repose which, when it is seen in life, is greater than the repose of death. The full, red lips, though the mouth was not open, showed the tiniest white line of pearly teeth within. Her hair, glorious in quantity and glossy black as the raven's wing, was piled in great masses over the white forehead, on which a few curling tresses strayed like tendrils. I was amazed at the likeness to Margaret, though I had had my mind prepared for this by Mr. Corbeck's quotation of her father's statement. This woman—I could not think of her as a mummy or a corpse—was the image of Margaret as my eyes had first lit on her. The likeness was increased by the jewelled ornament which she wore in her hair, the "Disk and Plumes", such as Margaret, too, had worn. It, too, was a glorious jewel; one noble pearl of moonlight lustre, flanked by carven pieces of moonstone.

Mr. Trelawny was overcome as he looked. He quite broke down; and when

Margaret flew to him and held him close in her arms and comforted him, I

heard him murmur brokenly:

“It looks as if you were dead, my child!”

There was a long silence. I could hear without the roar of the wind,

which was now risen to a tempest, and the furius dashing of the waves

far below. Mr. Trelawny’s voice broke the spell:

“Later on we must try and find out the process of embalming. It is not

like any that I know. There does not seem to have been any opening cut

for the withdrawing of the viscera and organs, which apparently remain

intact within the body. Then, again, there is no moisture in the flesh;

but its place is supplied with something else, as though wax or stearine

had been conveyed into the veins by some subtle process. I wonder could

it be possible that at that time they could have used paraffin. It

might have been, by some process that we know not, pumped into the

veins, where it hardened!”

Margaret, having thrown a white sheet over the Queen’s body, asked us to

bring it to her own room, where we laid it on her bed. Then she sent us

away, saying:

“Leave her alone with me. There are still many hours to pass, and I do

not like to leave her lying there, all stark in the glare of light.

This may be the Bridal she prepared for—the Bridal of Death; and at

least she shall wear her pretty robes.”

When presently she brought me back to her room, the dead Queen was

dressed in the robe of fine linen with the embroidery of gold; and all

her beautiful jewels were in place. Candles were lit around her, and

white flowers lay upon her breast.

Hand in hand we stood looking at her for a while. Then with a sigh,

Margaret covered her with one of her own snowy sheets. She turned away;

and after softly closing the door of the room, went back with me to the

others who had now come into the dining room. Here we all began to talk

over the things that had been, and that were to be.

Now and again I could feel that one or other of us was forcing

conversation, as if we were not sure of ourselves. The long wait was

beginning to tell on our nerves. It was apparent to me that Mr.

Trelawny had suffered in that strange trance more than we suspected, or

than he cared to show. True, his will and his determination were as

strong as ever; but the purely physical side of him had been weakened

somewhat. It was indeed only natural that it should be. No man can go

through a period of four days of absolute negation of life without being

weakened by it somehow.

As the hours crept by, the time passed more and more slowly. The other

men seemed to get unconsciously a little drowsy. I wondered if in the

case of Mr. Trelawny and Mr. Corbeck, who had already been under the

hypnotic influence of the Queen, the same dormance was manifesting

itself. Doctor Winchester had periods of distraction which grew longer

and more frequent as the time wore on.

As to Margaret, the suspense told on her exceedingly, as might have been

expected in the case of a woman. She grew paler and paler still; till

at last about midnight, I began to be seriously alarmed about her. I

got her to come into the library with me, and tried to make her lie down

on a sofa for a little while. As Mr. Trelawny had decided that the

experiment was to be made exactly at the seventh hour after sunset, it

would be as nearly as possible three o'clock in the morning when the

great trial should be made. Even allowing a whole hour for the final

preparations, we had still two hours of waiting to go through, and I promised faithfully to watch her and to awake her at any time she might name. She would not hear of it, however. She thanked me sweetly and smiled at me as she did so; but she assured me that she was not sleepy, and that she was quite able to bear up. That it was only the suspense and excitement of waiting that made her pale. I agreed perforce; but I kept her talking of many things in the library for more than an hour; so that at last, when she insisted on going back to her father's room I felt that I had at least done something to help her pass the time.

We found the three men sitting patiently in silence. With manlike fortitude they were content to be still when they felt they had done all in their power. And so we waited.

The striking of two o'clock seemed to freshen us all up. Whatever

shadows had been settling over us during the long hours preceding seemed

to lift at once; and we went about our separate duties alert and with

alacrity. We looked first to the windows to see that they were closed,

and we got ready our respirators to put them on when the time should be

close at hand. We had from the first arranged to use them for we did

not know whether some noxious fume might not come from the magic coffer

when it should be opened. Somehow, it never seemed to occur to any of

us that there was any doubt as to its opening.

Then, under Margaret's guidance, we carried the mummied body of Queen

Tera from her room into her father's, and laid it on a couch. We put

the sheet lightly over it, so that if she should wake she could at once

slip from under it. The severed hand was placed in its true position on

her breast, and under it the Jewel of Seven Stars which Mr. Trelawny had

taken from the great safe. It seemed to flash and blaze as he put it in

its place.

It was a strange sight, and a strange experience. The group of grave silent men carried the white still figure, which looked like an ivory statue when through our moving the sheet fell back, away from the lighted candles and the white flowers. We placed it on the couch in that other room, where the blaze of the electric lights shone on the great sarcophagus fixed in the middle of the room ready for the final experiment, the great experiment consequent on the researches during a lifetime of these two travelled scholars. Again, the startling likeness between Margaret and the mummy, intensified by her own extraordinary pallor, heightened the strangeness of it all. When all was finally fixed three-quarters of an hour had gone, for we were deliberate in all our doings. Margaret beckoned me, and I went out with her to bring in Silvio. He came to her purring. She took him up and handed him to me; and then did a thing which moved me strangely and brought home to me

keenly the desperate nature of the enterprise on which we were embarked.

One by one, she blew out the candles carefully and placed them back in

their usual places. When she had finished she said to me:

"They are done with now. Whatever comes—life or death—there will be no

purpose in their using now." Then taking Silvio into her arms, and

pressing him close to her bosom where he purred loudly, we went back to

the room. I closed the door carefully behind me, feeling as I did so a

strange thrill as of finality. There was to be no going back now. Then

we put on our respirators, and took our places as had been arranged. I

was to stand by the taps of the electric lights beside the door, ready

to turn them off or on as Mr. Trelawny should direct. Doctor Winchester

was to stand behind the couch so that he should not be between the mummy

and the sarcophagus; he was to watch carefully what should take place

with regard to the Queen. Margaret was to be beside him; she held

Silvio ready to place him upon the couch or beside it when she might

think right. Mr. Trelawny and Mr. Corbeck were to attend to the

lighting of the lamps. When the hands of the clock were close to the

hour, they stood ready with their linstocks.

The striking of the silver bell of the clock seemed to smite on our

hearts like a knell of doom. One! Two! Three!

Before the third stroke the wicks of the lamps had caught, and I had

turned out the electric light. In the dimness of the struggling lamps,

and after the bright glow of the electric light, the room and all within

it took weird shaps, and all seemed in an instant to change. We waited

with our hearts beating. I know mine did, and I fancied I could hear

the pulsation of the others.

The seconds seemed to pass with leaden wings. It were as though all the

world were standing still. The figures of the others stood out dimly,

Margaret’s white dress alone showing clearly in the gloom. The thick

respirators which we all wore added to the strange appearance. The thin

light of the lamps showed Mr. Trelawny's square jaw and strong mouth and

the brown shaven face of Mr. Corbeck. Their eyes seemed to glare in the

light. Across the room Doctor Winchester's eyes twinkled like stars,

and Margaret's blazed like black suns. Silvio's eyes were like

emeralds.

Would the lamps never burn up!

It was only a few seconds in all till they did blaze up. A slow, steady

light, growing more and more bright, and changing in colour from blue to

crystal white. So they stayed for a couple of minutes without change in

the coffer; till at last there began to appear all over it a delicate

glow. This grew and grew, till it became like a blazing jewel, and then

like a living thing whose essence of life was light. We waited and

waited, our hearts seeming to stand still.

All at once there was a sound like a tiny muffled explosion and the

cover lifted right up on a level plane a few inches; there was no

mistaking anything now, for the whole room was full of a blaze of light.

Then the cover, staying fast at one side rose slowly up on the other, as

though yielding to some pressure of balance. The coffer still continued

to glow; from it began to steal a faint greenish smoke. I could not

smell it fully on account of the respirator; but, even through that, I

was conscious of a strange pungent odour. Then this smoke began to grow

thicker, and to roll out in volumes of ever increasing density till the

whole room began to get obscure. I had a terrible desire to rush over

to Margaret, whom I saw through the smoke still standing erect behind

the couch. Then, as I looked, I saw Doctor Winchester sink down. He

was not unconscious; for he waved his hand back and forward, as though

to forbid any one to come to him. At this time the figures of Mr.

Trelawny and Mr. Corbeck were becoming indistinct in the smoke which

rolled round them in thick billowy clouds. Finally I lost sight of them

altogether. The coffer still continued to glow; but the lamps began to

grow dim. At first I thought that their light was being overpowered by

the thick black smoke; but presently I saw that they were, one by one,

burning out. They must have burned quickly to produce such fierce and

vivid flames.

I waited and waited, expecting every instant to hear the command to turn

up the light; but none came. I waited still, and looked with harrowing

intensity at the rolling billows of smoke still pouring out of the

glowing casket, whilst the lamps sank down and went out one by one.

Finally there was but one lamp alight, and that was dimly blue and

flickering. The only effective light in the room was from the glowing

casket. I kept my eyes fixed toward Margaret; it was for her now that

all my anxiety was claimed. I could just see her white frock beyond the

still white shrouded figure on the couch. Silvio was troubled; his

piteous mewing was the only sound in the room. Deeper and denser grew

the black mist and its pungency began to assail my nostrils as well as

my eyes. Now the volume of smoke coming from the coffer seemed to

lessen, and the smoke itself to be less dense. Across the room I saw

something white move where the couch was. There were several movements.

I could just catch the quick glint of white through the dense smoke in

the fading light; for now the glow of the coffer began quickly to

subside. I could still hear Silvio, but his mewing came from close

under; a moment later I could feel him piteously crouching on my foot.

Then the last spark of light disappeared, and through the Egyptian

darkness I could see the faint line of white around the window blinds.

I felt that the time had come to speak; so I pulled off my respirator and called out:

"Shall I turn up the light?" There was no answer; so before the thick smoke choked me, I called again but more loudly:

"Mr. Trelawny, shall I turn up the light?" He did not answer; but from across the room I heard Margaret's voice, sounding as sweet and clear as a bell:

"Yes, Malcolm!" I turned the tap and the lamps flashed out. But they were only dim points of light in the midst of that murky ball of smoke.

In that thick atmosphere there was little possibility of illumination.

I ran across to Margaret, guided by her white dress, and caught hold of her and held her hand. She recognised my anxiety and said at once:

"I am all right."

“Thank God!” I said. “How are the others? Quick, let us open all the

windows and get rid of this smoke!” To my surprise, she answered in a

sleepy way:

“They will be all right. They won’t get any harm.” I did not stop to

inquire how or on what ground she formed such an opinion, but threw up

the lower sashes of all the windows, and pulled down the upper. Then I

threw open the door.

A few seconds made a perceptible change as the thick, black smoke began

to roll out of the windows. Then the lights began to grow into strength

and I could see the room. All the men were overcome. Beside the couch

Doctor Winchester lay on his back as though he had sunk down and rolled

over; and on the farther side of the sarcophagus, where they had stood,

lay Mr. Trelawny and Mr. Corbeck. It was a relief to me to see that,

though they were unconscious, all three were breathing heavily as though

in a stupor. Margaret still stood behind the couch. She seemed at

first to be in a partially dazed condition; but every instant appeared

to get more command of herself. She stepped forward and helped me to

raise her father and drag him close to a window. Together we placed the

others similarly, and she flew down to the dining-room and returned with

a decanter of brandy. This we proceeded to administer to them all in

turn. It was not many minutes after we had opened the windows when all

three were struggling back to consciousness. During this time my entire

thoughts and efforts had been concentrated on their restoration; but now

that this strain was off, I looked round the room to see what had been

the effect of the experiment. The thick smoke had nearly cleared away;

but the room was still misty and was full of a strange pungent acrid

odour.

The great sarcophagus was just as it had been. The coffer was open, and

in it, scattered through certain divisions or partitions wrought in its

own substance, was a scattering of black ashes. Over all, sarcophagus,

coffer and, indeed, all in the room, was a sort of black film of greasy

soot. I went over to the couch. The white sheet still lay over part of

it; but it had been thrown back, as might be when one is stepping out of

bed.

But there was no sign of Queen Tera! I took Margaret by the hand and

led her over. She reluctantly left her father to whom she was

administering, but she came docilely enough. I whispered to her as I

held her hand:

"What has become of the Queen? Tell me! You were close at hand, and

must have seen if anything happened!" She answered me very softly:

"There was nothing that I could see. Until the smoke grew too dense I

kept my eyes on the couch, but there was no change. Then, when all grew

so dark that I could not see, I thought I heard a movement close to me.

It might have been Doctor Winchester who had sunk down overcome; but I

could not be sure. I thought that it might be the Queen waking, so I

put down poor Silvio. I did not see what became of him; but I felt as

if he had deserted me when I heard him mewing over by the door. I hope

he is not offended with me!" As if in answer, Silvio came running into

the room and reared himself against her dress, pulling it as though

clamouring to be taken up. She stooped down and took him up and began to

pet and comfort him.

I went over and examined the couch and all around it most carefully.

When Mr. Trelawny and Mr. Corbeck recovered sufficiently, which they did

quickly, though Doctor Winchester took longer to come round, we went

over it afresh. But all we could find was a sort of ridge of impalpable

dust, which gave out a strange dead odour. On the couch lay the jewel

of the disk and plumes which the Queen had worn in her hair, and the

Star Jewel which had words to command the Gods.

Other than this we never got clue to what had happened. There was just

one thing which confirmed our idea of the physical annihilation of the

mummy. In the sarcophagus in the hall, where we had placed the mummy of

the cat, was a small patch of similar dust.

*

In the autumn Margaret and I were married. On the occasion she wore the

mummy robe and zone and the jewel which Queen Tera had worn in her hair.

On her breast, set in a ring of gold make like a twisted lotus stalk,

she wore the strange Jewel of Seven Stars which held words to command

the God of all the worlds. At the marriage the sunlight streaming

through the chancel windows fell on it, and it seemed to glow like a

living thing.

The graven words may have been of efficacy; for Margaret holds to them,

and there is no other life in all the world so happy as my own.

We often think of the great Queen, and we talk of her freely. Once,

when I said with a sigh that I was sorry she could not have waked into a

new life in a new world, my wife, putting both her hands in mine and

looking into my eyes with that far-away eloquent dreamy look which

sometimes comes into her own, said lovingly:

"Do not grieve for her! Who knows, but she may have found the joy she

sought? Love and patience are all that make for happiness in this world;

or in the world of the past or of the future; of the living or the dead. She dreamed her dream; and that is all that any of us can ask!”

THE END