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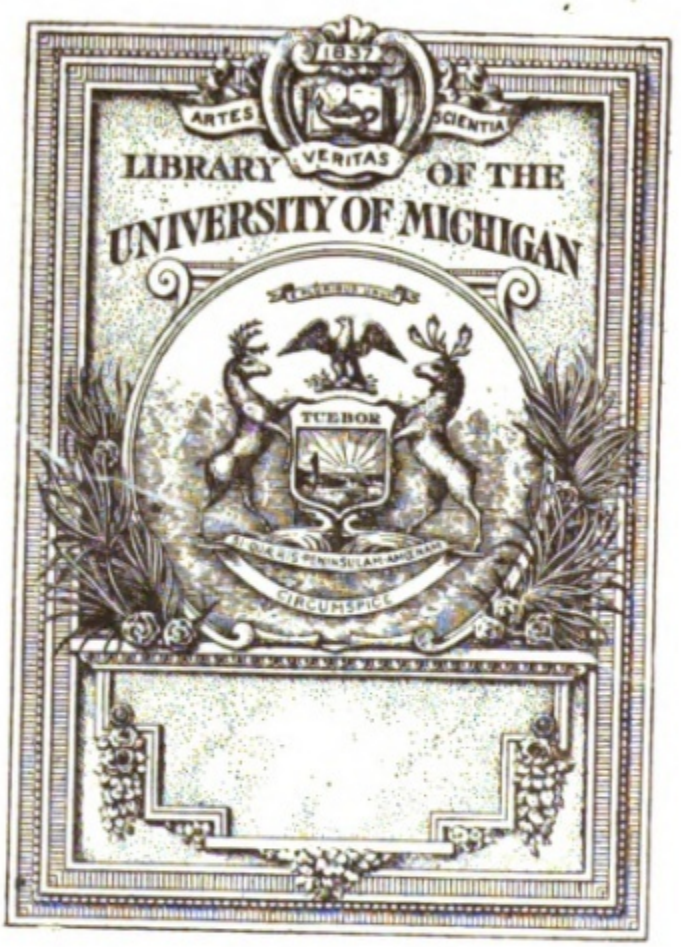

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A KING IN BABYLON

BY

BURTON E. STEVENSON

Author of "The Holladay Case," "The Mystery of the Boïle Cabinet," etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

W. H. D. KOERNER

BOSTON

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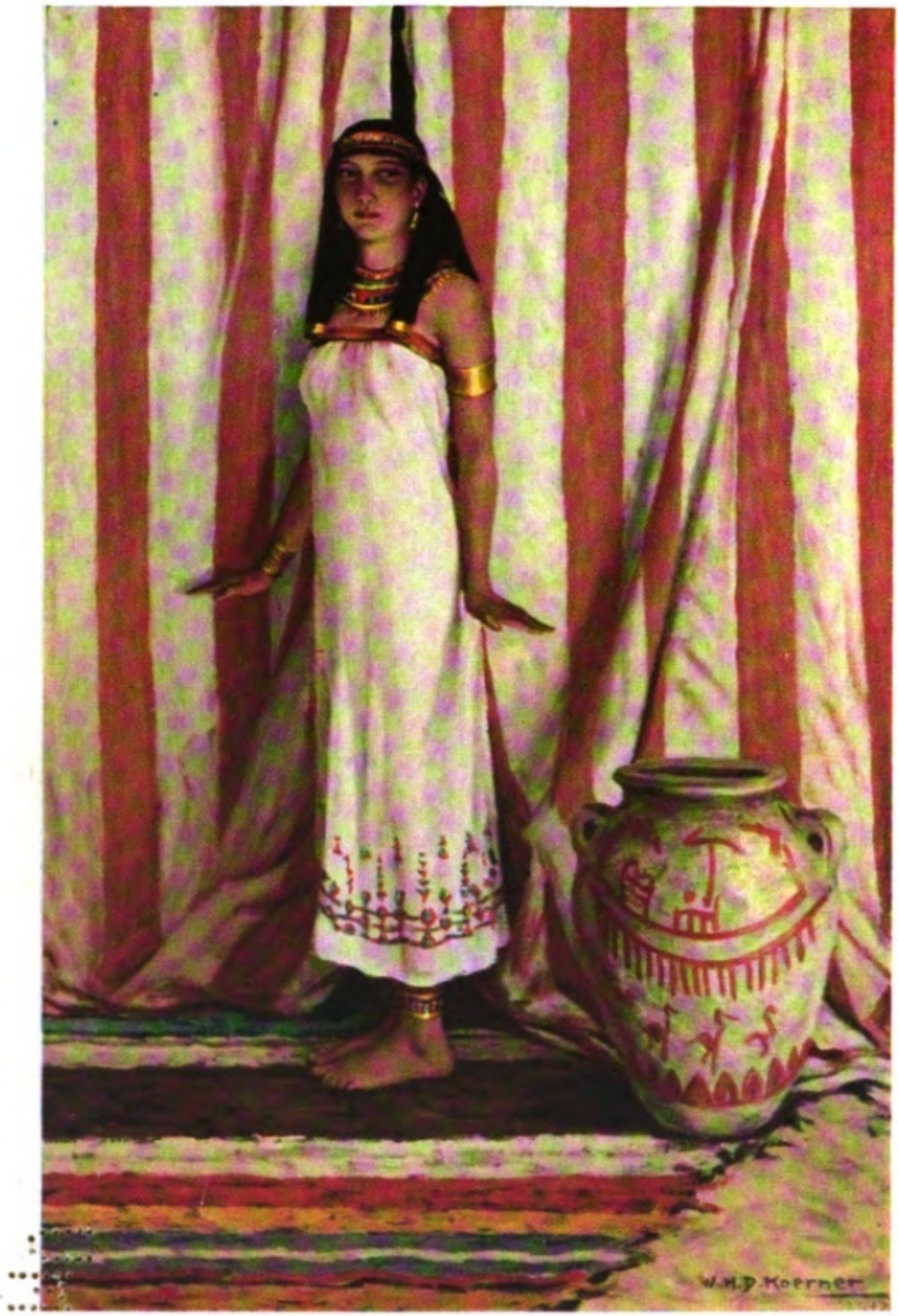

For there before our eyes was something more than an embodiment of ancient Egypt—it was ancient Egypt itself. *See page 151*

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For there before our eyes was something more than an embodiment of ancient Egypt—it was ancient Egypt itself. *See page 151.* . . . *Frontispiece*

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A KING IN BABYLON

CHAPTER I

I AM writing this story because Creel thinks it ought to be written in justice to ourselves and to Jimmy Allen. So do I, for that matter. The truth is bad enough, but it is mild as milk beside the outrageous tales which have been flying about the studios since we came back from Egypt without our leading man. And if the truth is to be told, it must be by either Creel or me.

I have tried to convince Creel that it is his job — that his long and varied experience in ripping scenarios open and turning them inside out and upside down should give him a terse and vivid style. His spoken style, as I happen to know, is extraordinarily terse and vivid! But he has snorted indignantly, and accused me of trying to shirk a clear duty. Even with the best will in the world, how, he has demanded, could he find time for such a task? And he has pointed out to me, with feeling, how a director has to sweat and slave all day trying to drive a glimmer of intelligence into a bunch of wooden actors, and then sit up all night laboring to

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inject some dramatic value into the rotten stuff passed out to him by the scenario editor; while a cameraman's life was one of elegant leisure, untroubled by anxiety, and his hardest work nothing more exhausting than to turn a crank!

I like Warren Creel. I like to work with him, for I consider him in many ways the best director in the business; but even he couldn't have got me started on a job like this if it hadn't been that, from the very first, I have had an uneasy consciousness that some day I should have to do it. There is nothing more disturbing to one's peace of mind than a thing like that — a sort of impending fate which there is no escaping. It has robbed me of many hours of much-needed rest; it has interfered with my appetite and my amusements; it has even involved me in unpleasant scenes with Mollie, when a random answer betrayed that I had not been giving due heed to her remarks. But the climax came yesterday.

Creel had been working all morning on a complicated scene with a lot of dubs who were more than usually thick-headed. He had gone over it again and again, but the effect he wanted *wouldn't* come, and his temper had grown more and more frazzled. Then, quite suddenly, like the bits of colored glass falling into place in a kaleidoscope, they got it.

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"Ready!" he snapped over his shoulder to me, and gave them the signal to start.

I don't know how it was, but just then I found myself looking, not at the set in front of me, but out across the drifted sands, away toward the horizon, where three vague shapes were fading into nothingness. . . .

And right in the middle of the scene, one of the actors stopped.

"What the devil's the matter with your cameraman, Creel?" he asked.

Creel whirled around with a face like thunder, and I suddenly awoke to the fact that I hadn't cranked a foot!

I pass over Creel's remarks, which I admit were justified. We started again, and by the time the scene was finished, he had cooled down.

"What *was* the matter, Billy?" he asked, more in sorrow than in anger. "You never went back on me like that before."

"I got to thinking about Jimmy Allen," I said, though I knew by the way he looked at me that he guessed what the matter was without my telling him.

"About that last night — and all the rest of it."

He passed his hand across his eyes, sort of helpless-like.

"I thought so," he said. "It takes *me* like that, sometimes. Right in the midst of things. Look

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here, Billy, you've got to write that story! We won't have any rest till you do!"

"Why don't *you* write it?" I asked.

"You know damn well why I don't write it," he snapped, with a ferocity which showed how much on edge he was. "I haven't got a minute I can call my own! Why, I haven't had a chance to sit down and smoke a cigar and talk to my wife since last Christmas — no, Christmas before last! My God! what a business for a sane man to be in! I'm going to quit! That's what I am! I'm going to quit!"

"Well, then you can write the story," I said. I knew there was about as much chance of his quitting as of — well, as of Jimmy Allen coming in at the door again, the way he used to do. Creel knew it too.

"Now, look here, Billy," he said, "I want you to make a start, anyway. I want you to start to-night. What were you going to do to-night?"

"I was coming over to see how that 'Red Cloak' picture turned out. I'm a little nervous about the lighting in that big ball-room scene."

"It isn't ready yet," said Creel. "There's a lot of cutting to do. So you've got to-night free. Now I want you to start that story. Just start it, that's all. If you get stuck, or your memory fails you —"

Memory fail me! I wish it would! But the

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events I am going to try to tell about are bitten in so deep that I'm afraid, sometimes, they'll never fade out. That's one reason why I am sitting here to-night starting the toughest job I ever tackled. For I am no writer — as everyone who tries to read this story will soon find out. But I have a sort of feeling that if once I get it set down on paper, I'll be able to think about it less. Yes — and there's another reason. Jimmy Allen was a good sort; he did a lot for me first and last, and I can't bear to think of the ugly gossip . . .

I shall never forget the morning that Creel had his great idea. We had about finished the feature we were working on, and Creel was more than usually disgusted with it. Everybody could see that it was ancient stuff, absolutely childish and unconvincing, and in spite of the artistic touches and unexpected twists which Creel had succeeded in giving it — and there was nobody in the business better at that sort of thing than he — I doubted if it would get across. And for more than a week he had been digging around among the scenarios in the office trying to find something which would do for his next production. But the more he dug, the more hopeless he grew.

"Not an idea in the lot," he said to me one morning; "not a single idea — not the beginning of an

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idea! And an idea is all I need — you know that, Billy."

I nodded, for it was true. Give Creel an idea, and he can work it up to the king's taste.

"The trouble is," he went on, running his fingers through that long, silky hair of his, as he always did when he was worried, "our people are in a rut. All they think about is 'punch'— sensations, explosions, wrecks, and sex stuff. Punch! Why, they're just fanning the air! And they know it! They know the public is sick to death of all that, but they can't think of anything else! They haven't got anything to think with! One of these days there is going to be a bust-up in the motion-picture business that won't leave anything but fragments!"

I knew that was true, too. They were mighty close over at the office, but it was plain enough that when a picture which had cost fifty thousand dollars to make died inside of a month the company was losing money. Big money. And that had happened recently not once, but half a dozen times. I could tell by the way the old man looked when he came across to the studio chewing that black cigar of his that things weren't going right. There were rumors of cancellations — lots of them. The only consolation was that all the producers, so far as I could see, were in the same boat. That wasn't much consolation, either; I don't know that it makes drowning

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any easier to have a lot of other people drown with you.

"What this business needs," went on Creel, "is imagination." Creel always liked to talk to me, maybe because I didn't say much, but just listened. "The public is tired of tricks — it's tired of erring wives and reformed drunkards and rough-necks with hearts of gold. It's tired of slap-stick! It's sick of vampires! And good God, I don't blame it! I'm surprised that it's stood for that old clap-trap as long as it has! There hasn't been a picture released for the past six months that was worth seeing. I include my own!"

Creel exaggerated, of course. There *are* scenario editors who have an idea now and then, and who know how to build up a screen story so that it holds together. But they are few — at least so it seems to me. I see a good many pictures — I want to know what the other fellows are doing — and I confess that I nearly always come away with a tired feeling. It seemed to me that most of them lacked not only imagination, but ordinary intelligence. They were downright silly. Not that I could do any better — if I could, I'd be doing it instead of cranking a camera. But one doesn't have to be a cook to know good cooking!

Then one morning when Creel came in, I could tell by the look on his face that something had hap-

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pened. I didn't say anything, but just ground out my foot a second till the scene was finished.

"That's all for this morning," says Creel. "I'm going over to see the old man," and he jammed his hat down on his head like a man getting ready to face a cyclone.

"What's up?" I asked. "Have you got it?"

"Yes, my son," says Creel, "I think I've got it."

"Find it at the office?" I asked.

"At the office? Lord, no! I found it in a newspaper — in the 'Poets' Corner,' or whatever they call it. That's one thing I've never done, Billy — read poetry. It seemed such a waste of time. But I was wrong — I was just ignorant, like all the rest of them! I know better now — I'm going through the poets from A to Z. Why, son, there's more imagination in this one little poem than there is in our whole staff!"

And with that he walked out.

I didn't see him again till we were ready to start work for the afternoon. Then he came in so amazingly cheerful that I knew things were all right. He grinned as he saw me looking at him.

"Pack your grip, son," he said. "We're going to Egypt!"

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CHAPTER II

CREEL told me afterwards what had happened, and I will set it down here in its proper place.

The old man was looking through his mail when Creel walked in, and his face was as black as a thunder-cloud. There was a time when he enjoyed going through his mail — I know, because I started in as office-boy, and I remember how he used to come running out with this letter or that letter and read us bits of them. When he first got into the moving-picture game he usually managed to keep several jumps ahead of the other fellows, and it was "roses, roses, all the way," as I read in a title the other night. In other words, exhibitors, critics, and the public generally were always handing him bouquets. It's wonderful how little it takes to please them!

But now it was only brick-bats and cancellations. All the producers were getting them, of course, for the public was growing more and more exacting, and competition was fiercer than it had ever been; but the old man thought he was getting more than his share, and they worried him. It wasn't so much the money loss; it was more the loss of prestige. He had always boasted that his trade-mark was a guarantee of quality, that any picture with his name on it was

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a good picture — and he had believed it, too, and so had the public. The critics got to calling him the Belasco of Filmdom. But they hadn't called him that for a long time now. Worse still, his public seemed gradually to be deserting him.

The old man did everything he could. He corralled the biggest stars in the country; he spent money like water. But somehow money didn't seem to be able to turn the trick. The higher the salary he paid a star, the more money he spent on a production, the flatter it seemed to fall. There was something lacking. Creel said it was imagination. Anyway, it was evidently something that money couldn't buy. And the old man fretted; he lost weight; his temper grew uncertain . . .

So the light in his eye wasn't exactly dove-like when he looked up and saw Creel come in. It had always been Creel's privilege to go in without knocking — something like wearing one's hat in the presence of royalty.

"I was just going to send for you," said the old man. "Read that!" and he thrust a letter into Creel's hand.

It was a cancellation from one of his oldest and most important exhibitors; it meant the loss of the best house in a town of two hundred thousand people. The letter had plainly been written with great reluctance. He had tried to hold on, the fellow

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said; he *had* held on longer than he would for anybody else; but it wasn't any use. His public wouldn't stand it, and he couldn't afford to lose any more money. "The Soul of Rachel" had finished it. And he ventured a kindly word of advice: the Apex people were putting out stuff with pep in it — why not take the cue from them? Anyway, for a while, at least, he was going to run the Apex program.

"He's right about 'The Soul of Rachel' being a rotten picture," said Creel, as he handed the letter back.

"You made it," said the old man.

"I know I did — but it was the same old stuff — it was so old it stank! I did the best I could. But the public is tired of being buncoed."

"Sit down," said the old man, who knew as well as anybody that Creel was the best director in the business and that there were half a dozen other companies eager to snap him up — and pay him more money. He also knew that it wasn't money Creel was working for, but love of the game, and he respected him as well as liked him. "What are we going to do?"

"If it were *my* plant," says Creel, sitting down, "the first thing I would do would be to fire that bunch of office-boys and cash-girls you've got in there under the name of scenario editors."

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"Who'll I get in place of them?"

"If you didn't get anybody, you wouldn't be any worse off than you are, and you'd save a lot of money. There isn't an idea in the bunch — never has been, for that matter. The only ideas they've ever had, they've stolen from other people!"

"Go on!" says the old man, chewing his cigar. "Go on!"

"I intend to go on," says Creel. "The next thing I would do would be to get a man who knew something for the head of my editorial department. Not a cheap reporter, or a bum actor, or a rounder from the tenderloin. Not a rough-neck like you and me; but a man who was the real thing — a man who was really educated — a man of culture and imagination, who knew art and literature — who was interested in the possibilities of this business, and who wasn't afraid of work."

"All right," said the old man; "give me his address, and I'll 'phone him to come right down."

"I wish I could," said Creel, with a sigh. "But such a man *must* exist somewhere, and some day we'll find him."

"And in the meantime?" asked the old man.

"In the meantime, we'll have to worry along the best we can. But there's one think you *can* do — write a personal letter — no rubber-stamp affair — to a list of novelists and dramatists I'll make out

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for you, inviting them to submit ideas, or short synopses, and telling them three things — that you'll read their stuff yourself, not turn it over to an office-boy, and that you'll guarantee that it will not be stolen; that any scenario that is made from it will be submitted to them for suggestions and approval before it is filmed; and that you intend to pay well. And when I say well, I mean well — up to ten thousand dollars for a ten-page synopsis."

The old man rolled his cigar to the other side of his mouth.

"Creel, you're crazy," he said. "The synopsis is the very smallest item in the cost of a picture."

"Yes — it always has been!" Creel retorted. "That's just what's the matter! How much did you lose on 'The Soul of Rachel'? Twenty thousand?"

"All of that."

"You'd have made that much — or probably more — if there'd been a real idea back of it. It was a good film, but it didn't get anywhere — it just fizzled out. It's ideas we want. And the only way to get them is to pay for them."

"Ten thousand per idea is pretty steep."

"Listen," said Creel. "There is one thing motion picture people don't seem to understand. When a man writes a novel or a play, the money he gets out of it is the smallest part of his reward

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— though it's frequently a good many times ten thousand dollars! At least, it isn't only the money he's working for — not if he's the real thing. He's working in the first place, of course, for the love of it, as every artist must; but he's also working for fame. Away at the back of his head is the hope that a hundred years from now somebody will be reading his book and enjoying it; or if it's a play, it's the first night he thinks about — the excitement, the applause, and all that — and the name he'll make for himself. We haven't any such reward to offer — we can't promise a man immortality — so we've got to do our best to make it up in cash."

"I agree," grunted the old man. "Anything else?"

"Only one thing — and that is that worth-while men have a pride in their work. They won't stand by and see it butchered. No publisher would dream of altering a word in a book without the author's consent. And we've got to be just as careful. When the right men know they can trust us, and that we'll treat them fairly and courteously, I believe we can interest them. But not before.'"

"All right," said the old man. "Give me your list, and I'll send out the letters. But we can't shut up shop while these literary lights are gestating. We've got to have two releases a week! What are you going to do next? Got any idea?"

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Creel's face, which had been overcast, suddenly lighted up.

"The best I ever had!" he answered.

The old man looked at Creel quickly; he hadn't been expecting an answer like that. It was something of a shock after all that had gone before.

"Let's have it," he said.

Creel dived into his pocket and got out his notebook and fished out a newspaper clipping.

"This synopsis," he began, "has been furnished by a fellow named W. E. Henley. I never heard of him — but that only shows how ignorant I am, for he surely knows how to write!"

"How much will it cost?" asked the old man.

"It won't cost a cent," said Creel. "The author is dead — worse luck! — and it was never copyrighted — not in this country, anyway. Read it," and he tossed it across the desk.

The old man picked it up and glanced at it.

"Why, it's a poem!" he said.

"It is," said Creel; "and for the rest of my days, I'm going to spend my spare time reading poetry. It's a regular gold-mine! What do you think of the first nugget?"

The old man looked at the clipping again, and this is what he read:

Or ever the knightly years were gone
With the old world to the grave,

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I was a King in Babylon
And you were a Christian Slave.

I saw, I took, I cast you by,
I bent and broke your pride.
You loved me well, or I heard them lie,
But your longing was denied.
Surely I knew that by and by
You cursed your gods and died.

And a myriad suns have set and shone
Since then upon the grave
Decreed by the King in Babylon
To her that had been his Slave.

The pride I trampled is now my scathe,
For it tramples me again.
The old resentment lasts like death,
For you love, yet you refrain.
I break my heart on your hard unfaith,
And I break my heart in vain.

Yet not for an hour do I wish undone
The deed beyond the grave,
When I was a King in Babylon
And you were a Virgin Slave.

"Do you get it?" asked Creel, when the old man had finished.

The old man nodded.

"I kind of get it," he said.

"And the title — there it is —'A King in Babylon.'"

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The old man nodded again, and read the poem through a second time.

"Of course I haven't got it worked out yet," Creel went on, "but the more I think about it, the more possibilities I see. I'm just going to rough it in, now. I'll work out the details on the way over."

"The way over where?" asked the old man.

"The way over to Egypt," says Creel.

"Oh," says the old man, "are you going to Egypt?"

"There's no use to go to Babylon," says Creel. "I was looking, just the other day, at a picture of the ruins — they've been excavating there, you know — but they're just a lot of fragments of brick walls, — like houses after a fire. And the country round about is as ugly as a mud fence."

"We could build some ruins," the old man suggested.

"No we couldn't — the people would spot the fake at once, and despise it. I want this to be the real thing — ruins and natives and atmosphere and everything. And the only place to get atmosphere is on the spot. Egypt is the place — magnificent ruins, atmosphere so thick you can cut it with a knife, and a sort of reputation for mystery which is just what we want in this picture."

"But, great Scott, Creel," said the old man, "I

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can't afford to send an expedition to Egypt! It would cost a hundred thousand dollars."

"No, it won't," said Creel. "If this picture costs over thirty thousand, you can take it out of my salary. Some of the stuff, of course, can be done here. For the Egyptian stuff, I'll take only six or seven people. I'll need a lot of natives, but they are cheap. I don't believe in crowds anyway, except as a background."

"How about costumes?" asked the old man.

"They'll cost something for they've got to be right. But we'll need only a few elaborate ones."

"Hum-m-m," said the old man, looking along his nose. "I don't mind telling you, Creel — I guess you know it, anyway — that we've got to do something pretty soon, or quit. Do you really think this is it?"

"Yes," said Creel; "I really do."

"Well, then," said the old man, "go ahead. And don't stint yourself. Do it right. We've got some pretty fair stuff ready for the next three months, and if this turns out all right, we'll make it our big spring release. Maybe by that time we'll have heard from some of these authors — or maybe you'll have found that highbrow wonder you were talking about. Who do you want for the leads?"

"I want Jimmy Allen, for one."

"All right; I can get him."

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"And Félice Tabor for the other."

The old man frowned. He didn't like Félice Tabor.

"She's under contract to the Apex," he objected, "and I'd hate to ask any favors of those people. Won't anybody else do?"

"She's the type," said Creel. "And she can act."

The old man grunted skeptically.

"I never thought so," he said. "But if you want her, I'll see what I can do. Anybody else?"

"No — nobody but people we've got. I'll take my wife and Mollie Adams as seconds; and Digby to fill in and look after the props; and I want Billy Williams for the cameraman. And — oh, yes — plenty of film — fifteen thousand feet, anyway. And it will have to be special film for tropical work. You'd better order it right away."

"All right," said the old man again, and picked up his pen. "Let me know how you're getting on," he added, as Creel rose.

"I will," said Creel, and started for the door.

"And, Creel," added the old man, when his hand was on the knob; "don't think I don't appreciate all you're doing. I do. And I'm ready to back you to my last cent."

And Creel was so overwhelmed by this unexampled outburst, that he didn't get his breath till he

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was out in the yard again. Then he took off his hat and ran his fingers through his hair; and I'm sure that his eyes were a little moist.

"Things must be worse than I thought," he said to himself. "Well, old boy, it's up to you!"

And with that, he went home to lunch and told the news to his wife.

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CHAPTER III

I HAVE often thought that if, on the Day of Judgment, room could be found in Heaven for only one person from this earth, Ma Creel would be that person. I am not alone in that opinion. Most of those who know Ma Creel share it, among them — or rather, in the forefront of them — Mollie Adams, whom Ma Creel has raised.

Mollie's father was Hugh Adams, perhaps the greatest acrobat of his generation, and her mother was Ma Creel's sister, and when her father lost his life through the snapping of a guy wire, and her mother died of shock two days later, why, of course, Ma Creel took her. And whether through Ma Creel's influence, or her own disposition, or both, she grew up to be the sweetest, cleverest, and most tormenting girl that I have ever known. Of course she had gone into the movies as soon as she could walk, almost; and the principal trial of my life was the fact that she was away so much, on other locations; and recently, she had been doing some work for the Apex . . .

I may as well state here that I am in love with Mollie, and have been ever since she was a kid. In

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fact, she isn't much more than a kid, even yet! Just at the dangerous age when she might lose her head over some handsome scoundrel. Consequently, when Creel told me to pack my bag for Egypt, I did not respond with any great enthusiasm, not knowing what his arrangements as to his family were.

The state of my affections was, of course, no secret, and Creel smiled dryly as he looked at me.

"You don't seem to be overjoyed," he said. "It's a great chance, but if you don't want to go . . ."

"Is Mollie going?" I blurted out.

"Yes, Mollie's going — but if you'd rather stay on here . . ."

"Oh, shut up!" I said. "You know what I mean!"

"Yes," said Creel, "I do. And all I've got to say is this: if you can't finish your job with two long sea-voyages and two or three weeks in the desert, I'm going to give you the boot myself, if Mollie hasn't the heart to, when we get back!"

"All right," I said; "I agree to that!"

And I did my work that afternoon with the blood singing in my ears. Yes, if I couldn't bring Mollie to terms on a trip like that, I might as well quit. Up to the present, I really hadn't had a fair chance. She was away so much, that there hadn't been time for a decisive action. Just when I had my artillery

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preparation complete, and was ready to rush in my infantry, she would whisk away to the other side of the country!

At that time, she was working with a company down in Florida, and I hadn't seen her for a month. I kept up a daily bombardment of clippings and bon-bons and such things, but the only reply I drew was a very occasional postcard telling of the ripping time she was having, or a photograph showing her in the midst of a bunch of obviously-enslaved muts, who were looking at her in a way that made me want to smash the lot of them. And when I found out that our male lead was to be Jimmy Allen, and that Creel and old Digby were the only other men in the party except myself, I felt better than ever.

Jimmy Allen was a square fellow, and he wouldn't flirt with Mollie, because he knew how I felt about her. Probably he wouldn't have flirted with her anyway, for he never seemed to have any real affinity for women. He was a splendid actor, and his love-scenes certainly looked the real thing; but I happened to know that more than one leading lady who had tried to continue them off-stage had been turned down. Not harshly, of course; Jimmy couldn't be harsh with any one; but he just hadn't seemed to understand. For one party not to seem to understand, when the other party knows all the time that he *does* understand, is deadly in a case like that!

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Jimmy was cursed with the fatal gift of beauty. It was that which, in the beginning, had caused him to be singled out from the extras. He had dark, mysterious eyes, and crinkly black hair that waved just enough and not too much, and a dusky, lustrous sort of skin that the camera somehow made the most of. There was something about him that always struck me as Oriental — though the only Orientals I knew were Jews — and old Omar, whom I had recently discovered — and he wasn't in the least like them. And I also knew his father and mother, an unassuming Irish couple living in Jersey City, where his father was sergeant of police. So there couldn't really have been anything Oriental about him; it was just chance which had given him that appearance. At least, so I thought then. I know better now.

Well, his good looks had brought him many a punching as a boy, which left his black eyes blacker than ever and his shapely nose dripping gore, and no doubt he had cursed them often enough; but they had proved a blessing in the end. In the first place, they had caused him to be singled out from the crowd of boys loafing around the gate of the Pathé studio when a bell-boy had been wanted in a hurry. Other small parts had followed; he had worked hard, as he matured; and when it was finally discovered that he could act as well as look soulful, and

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that the public liked him, there wasn't any limit to his future!

I'm bound to say that Jimmy wasn't spoiled by it. He still lived at home, and brought his mother over occasionally to see Ma Creel, and kept on fighting off the ladies. There was really something lacking in him where women were concerned. It wasn't that he didn't like them — he did, in a way — liked to have them around, liked to josh them, liked to put an arm about them sometimes — but beyond that he wasn't interested. Funny thing, too — the quickest and surest way to make him mad was to intimate any resemblance to Galahad!

If I hadn't known better, I'd have said there was a great love in his life which left no room for any small ones. But that was nonsense. I had known him since he was a boy; I had even helped punch those black eyes of his; and there had never been the suspicion of a girl. Since we came back from Egypt, I have thought it over a good deal, and I think that now I understand . . .

We finished the picture we were on, and I had a chance to loaf a little and go around and see what the other fellows were doing, while Creel got things into shape for his great film. He was a busy man, those days. In the first place, he had to get his idea sketched out, so that he could tell what would be

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needed in the way of props and backgrounds and locations; but he kept mighty quiet about it for fear some inkling of it would leak out, and some other producer would beat him to it with a cheap production that would ruin his. I don't believe he ever showed that clipping to any one but the old man till we were well on our way to Egypt — I know he didn't show it to me till long afterwards, and I hadn't the slightest idea what the film was to be about. If there had been any way for him to suppress Henley's poems and destroy all existing copies, he'd have done it without the slightest compunction!

Then, after he had decided what locations he'd need, he had to find them; and he studied photographs and talked to the experts up at the Metropolitan Art Museum till he knew Egypt pretty well from one end to the other. I gathered that what he was looking for was some imposing place at the edge of the desert, which had not been fully excavated, and where he could set his gangs at work, and from this I inferred that Jimmy Allen was to play the part of an explorer digging into the old tombs, and, of course, making all sorts of startling discoveries. When I think of the discoveries we really made . . .

And at about this stage, Creel struck a snag which nearly upset the whole plan, for he discovered that it was exceedingly doubtful if he could get into Egypt

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at all. What with threats of a Turkish attack on the Suez Canal and her desire to keep secret her own preparations to meet it, England wasn't exactly welcoming any visitors to Egypt just then. Moreover, the United States government, while stoutly maintaining the right of its citizens to go anywhere they wanted to, was declining to issue passports to anybody who couldn't show a good and sufficient reason for going, and without passports it was impossible to get on a ship — to say nothing of getting off again!

In the beginning, Creel's application came back with the intimation that it would be perhaps as well for him to confine his activities to America for the present; and his subsequent protestations as to the immense service he was planning for the cause of art were received coldly, not to say skeptically. Finally he gathered together our photographs and pedigrees and birth-certificates, and departed grimly for Washington. He was gone three or four days, and when he came back, he had not only the passports, but a letter from the British ambassador, recommending him to the good graces of the authorities in Egypt. How he got it I don't know. He has always refused to tell me — perhaps it is a secret which must wait till the war is over!

Then, just as everything seemed serene again, he struck another snag. The old man called him into

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the office one day and told him he couldn't get Félice Tabor.

"She positively refuses to go abroad," he explained. "She's afraid she'll be submarined. Besides, I think she's got a new affair on."

"Did you offer her enough?" Creel asked.

"I offered her ten thousand and expenses," said the old man. "Don't you think that was enough?"

"Yes, I do," said Creel. "If she doesn't want to go, that settles it, I guess," he added gloomily. "However, I'll have a talk with her."

He did, but Félice remained obdurate. In spite of the fascinating picture he painted of the great opportunity it would be for her, of his assurance that there was not the slightest danger, and of many other things explained with the fluency of which only Creel was capable, she refused to go. It wasn't often Creel acknowledged himself beaten; but he was beaten then, and he admitted it that evening. He said afterwards that it was Fate — and I am inclined to agree with him!

"I've got to get somebody else," he said, "and mighty quick, too. We're going to sail a week from to-morrow."

"There's lots of actresses," I pointed out. "Too many, in fact."

"It's not only an actress I want," said Creel; "it's a type. I want a woman,— a beautiful woman —

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with dark hair and eyes and skin, and the look of the Orient about her. I want her to suggest the Mysterious East by the way she moves; I want her to suggest the harem by the way she looks at you. I want her to have the sensuous Oriental atmosphere. Jimmy Allen has it — though with him it's only skin deep! and the Lord alone knows where he got even that! But that's the reason I'm taking him. Now, if I can get just the right type of woman, who also knows how to act, to work opposite him, I'll put over the greatest picture that was ever thrown on the screen."

I named two or three women who had some reputation and who I thought might perhaps fill the specifications. But he shook his head at all of them.

"They're all hackneyed and stilted," he objected. "They've all been taught to get certain effects in certain ways. So has Félice Tabor, for that matter; but she has intelligence, and if I could have got her out there in the desert where she couldn't run away, I'd have whipped her into shape. But these other women haven't even intelligence. They'd behave on the Nile just as they do at Rector's. Besides, the public is tired of their tricks."

He sat for some minutes running his fingers through his hair, and I knew what he was thinking: if he could only discover an unknown, a great

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unknown, and introduce her through the medium of a great picture! That would be a double triumph! At last he jumped up, shaking his head.

"Let's forget our troubles by looking at other people's," he said, and we spent the rest of the evening in and out of the picture houses along Broadway.

The pictures we saw were, of course, the very cream of the week's releases — otherwise they wouldn't have been on Broadway; but we grew more and more depressed as we went from one to another. One had been adapted from a comic opera, one from a play, and three from books. They were well-staged and well-acted, the photography and lighting were excellent, the direction in many instances artistic and subtle; but their plots, in so far as they could be said to possess plots at all, were puerile. In the play, the puerility had been disguised by brilliant dialogue, and in the books by clever characterization; but stripped of words and set naked on the screen, they were enough to make the angels weep!

Creel's face was grim as we came out of the last show.

"There you are, Billy," he said; "you see the depths to which the motion-picture business has fallen. Not having any ideas of its own, it tries to get them from plays and novels. But plays don't

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make good features because they haven't got plot enough and have to be padded out of all resemblance to themselves; most novels don't because they have too much plot and the audience gets lost trying to follow it."

"Some of the companies are putting out original stuff," I said.

"Original!" echoed Creel. "Noah might have called it that! As a matter of fact, most producers don't want new stuff. They're afraid of it. What they want is the old stuff warmed over!"

"Yes, that's true," I agreed. And it is. Indeed, this story proves it — at Creel's expense!

"And when they try to write new stuff — well — do you ever read the summaries at the back of the *World* or the *News*?"

"Sometimes," I admitted.

"And you call them original?"

I had to confess that most of them reminded me of the literary exercises at a country school.

"That's just it," said Creel; "and that's the sort of stuff I have to produce! Oh, my God!"

"You won't have to this time," I pointed out.

"No," he agreed, but his face didn't light up the way I thought it would. "No."

He stood for a moment looking gloomily up and down the street; then he bade me good-night, and plunged into the Subway.

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CHAPTER IV

THE trouble was that Creel was suffering from the reaction which every artist feels when he turns his great idea over and looks at it and tries to work it out. He was wondering if, after all, it was as brilliant as he had thought it; he was doubting his ability to develop it as it should be developed. He always got into the dumps at this stage of every picture he put on, and it was then that Ma Creel and the old man showed the stuff they were made of. There was never any doubt in *their* minds — apparently! — and between them they always managed to boost Creel along over the low places.

They did it this time, but it was a hard pull, for his usual despondency was increased by the fact that he hadn't been able to find an actress to suit him. And the sailing day was drawing steadily nearer — and Creel swore it shouldn't be postponed. He was superstitious about postponements. He and old Digby were so swamped with the work of checking up the costumes and props and making sure that everything was provided for, that finally he asked me to help. But there was one prop which fairly gave me the creeps.

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"Come in here," Creel said to me one day; "here's a member of the company you haven't seen," and he led the way into the workroom.

There on the table lay what looked to me like a half-decayed body. The foreman grinned when he saw the way I jumped. But I could almost smell it. The nose was gone and the eyes; the leathery lips were parted in a ghastly smile, and there was a long wisp of black hair clinging to the blackened skull. You could see the ribs sticking up, and the abdomen had fallen away into the pelvis . . .

"What do you think of her?" asked Creel proudly.

"Is it a her?" I countered feebly.

"My dear boy," said Creel, "you see before you all that remains of Meri-Tau, a young lady once the toast of the court of Pharaoh, but who fell into evil ways, and whose end was most tragic."

"Really?" I asked, for I couldn't for the life of me tell by looking at the thing whether it was a fake or not.

Creel laughed.

"That's a compliment for you, Peter," he said to the foreman.

"Then it's a fake?" I asked.

"It was made on the premises," said Creel, "by Peter and his assistants, under the supervision of an expert from the Met."

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When I found that it was only papier-maché, I went closer and looked at it. It was certainly a masterpiece.

"It is a copy of a real one," said Creel; "but I think we've improved on the original. That smile now," and he indicated the grinning lips.

"Why didn't you borrow the original?" I asked.

"The original wouldn't have done, even if I could have got it," Creel explained. "It wouldn't stand the handling."

"Will it have to be handled?"

"Oh, yes," said Creel with a smile. "Jimmy Allen will have to hug it quite a good deal."

After all, I reflected, there were some advantages a cameraman had, even over a leading actor. For one thing, he didn't have to hug mummies — even imitation ones!

"Who's your other lead?" I asked.

Creel's face clouded.

"I haven't got her yet," he said. "I've got an option on two girls who might possibly do, but I'm not going to close till the last minute. Something may turn up. I always was lucky, you know!"

That night Mollie Adams came back from Florida, and I lost interest in Creel's troubles; I instantly acquired a lively set of my own!

When I called her up and asked if I might come around and see her, she shied right away.

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"I haven't got time," she said. "If I'm going to Egypt, I've got to be getting ready."

"If?" I echoed. "Is there any 'if' about it?"

"I hate ocean voyages, and the Apex people have made me a mighty good offer. I'll make up my mind to-morrow."

"I suppose you know I'm going?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, uninterested-like. "Aunt Mary told me."

There didn't seem to be anything more for me to say except good-bye, and I was just going to hang up, when she stopped me.

"Wait a minute," she said. "Aunt Mary wants to see you about something. She wants to know if you can come around to-night for a little while."

"Of course I can," I said. "Wasn't I just asking you if I might?"

"Oh, so you were," she said. "Well, Aunt Mary will be looking for you about eight."

I spent the afternoon overhauling my cameras and getting my apparatus generally ship-shape, just to have something to occupy my mind, and in the evening I went around to Ma Creel's. I hardly expected to see Mollie after what she had said over the 'phone, but it was she who opened the door. She explained that Ma Creel would be down in a minute, and while we were waiting, she told me all about the good time she had been having in Florida, and how a

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fellow named Rogers had been blowing himself for her.

"He's a real actor," she went on, with what seemed to me unnecessary enthusiasm, "and one of the handsomest men I ever saw. Not the wishy-washy kind, but strong and virile — the sort of man who would protect a woman against the world."

"I always thought you were perfectly able to protect yourself," I said.

"I suppose I am," she agreed; "but a girl gets tired of the battle — she longs for a strong man's arm about her . . ."

"Well," I began, "I've got an arm — two of them, in fact . . ."

"He has signed up with the Apex for two years," she cut in before I could finish, "and he's awfully anxious that I should join, too. They've offered me a splendid contract — and they're getting ready for a perfectly swell production — and I certainly do like Florida."

"I've been told," I said, "that Egypt is much more interesting."

Mollie grimaced.

"Fleas and bad smells, principally, so Mr. Rogers says!"

"What does he know about it?" I demanded.

"He has been looking it up for me."

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"That was kind of him!" I snapped; I couldn't help it. Mr. Rogers had got on my nerves.

"So I thought," agreed Mollie coldly. "He was always trying to do things for me."

"Look here, Mollie," I said, desperately, after a moment; "you know I love you — everybody else knows it, at any rate . . ."

"Yes," broke in Mollie bitterly, "they do! That's just it! What right have you to plaster me with 'Don't Touch' signs? It makes me feel like a fool!"

"Well, I can't help it — and I'm not ashamed of it! And I haven't plastered you with 'Don't Touch' signs — at least I've never observed that anybody ever paid any attention to them. But what I was going to say is that you've never seen enough of me to really make up your mind about me."

"Oh, haven't I!" said Mollie.

"No, you haven't. What with Florida and Mexico and the Adirondacks, you haven't been here enough to get acquainted with me. Now here's what I propose — you come along with Ma Creel. I won't bother you — I promise you that; but I'll be around where you can find me if you want me; and you can sort of size me up, and if you decide you don't want me, why all right. I'll never whim-

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per, however bad it hurts! But I *do* think — if only for the sake of old times — I ought to have a chance before you turn me down."

"I'll think about it," said Mollie, looking at me kind of queer. "What *is* this show, anyway?"

"I don't know," I said, "except that there's a mummy in it — the ugliest one I ever saw. Creel is keeping mighty close about it — he's afraid somebody will steal his idea. But he says it's a big one, and that's enough for me."

"Mr. Rogers was saying that it's a common report the old man is nearly down and out," Mollie remarked.

"Mr. Rogers had better mind his own business!" I snorted, for I couldn't stand it to hear anybody knocking the old man. "He's been losing money — we all know that — but he hasn't lost his nerve, which is more than can be said of some of the others."

"Well, you needn't get so mad about it," said Mollie. "I think as much of the old man as you do."

"One would never suspect it!" I retorted. "Not to hear you passing on the knocks of every cheap actor who comes along. If I'm not mistaken, this Mr. Rogers of yours was fired by the old man about three years ago."

"He resigned," said Mollie. "He told me all

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about it. The old man took a grudge against him because he had ideas of his own."

"Importance!" said I.

"What?"

"You didn't finish your sentence," said I. "You left off the last word."

"Look here, Mr. Williams," said Mollie, her eyes blazing, "you're getting altogether too smart for a cameraman. You ought to be writing scenarios."

"I've often thought so myself," I agreed.

"And since I haven't any use for a high-brow," Mollie hurried on, her lips shaking a little, "I'll just bid you good-bye now, without waiting for that trip to Egypt."

"All right," I said; and reached for my hat, with a dim notion that I would walk straight to the river and throw myself in.

And just then the door flew open, and Creel came in.

He came in like a whirlwind, and dashed his hat in one corner, and caught Mollie around the waist and hugged her.

"Where's Mary?" he shouted, waltzing Mollie around the room. "Where's my wife? Oh, hello, Billy," he added, seeing me for the first time. "Didn't know you were here. Might have known it, too!"

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"Let me go!" panted Mollie, tearing herself out of his arms. "Mr. Williams came to see Aunt Mary."

"Of course!" chortled Creel. "That's what I meant! Well, has he seen her?"

"No," said Mollie, her face very red; "not yet. I was just going to call her . . ."

And just then Ma Creel came down the stairs.

"What's all this noise?" she demanded; and then she saw her husband's face, and gave a little gasp of relief. "Have you found her, Warrie?" she asked, running to him.

Creel dropped Mollie and hugged his wife.

"Yes, darlint, I've found her! The very girl! The living, breathing ideal I've been dreaming of! That Tabor woman's nowhere!"

"Who is she?" they demanded, in the same breath.

"I don't even know her name," said Creel, "but I happened in at that little house on Fourteenth Street, and they were showing a French film, and I took just one look . . ."

"Is she French?"

"Yes — and exactly the type I want! You should see her eyes! She only had a small part — but she can act — I could see that! Her fortune's made — and so is mine!"

"But where is she?" asked Ma Creel.

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"She's in Paris, I guess. Anyway, I cabled Powers, our Paris man, to get after her quick and sign her up, and have her waiting on the pier at Marseilles when our boat reaches there."

"But suppose she won't go?"

"Oh, she'll go," said Creel easily. "It's a great chance for an obscure little actress. Besides, Powers will kidnap her, if necessary. I know Powers. By the way, Mollie," he added, putting his hand in his pocket, "here's your contract. The old man O.K'd. it this afternoon. He said he was glad to give you the increase."

Mollie's face was crimson as she took the contract; then she marched out of the room without saying a word.

"What's the matter with her?" asked Creel. "She'll get a hundred a week extra . . ."

"I don't think it's the contract," said Ma Creel. "I thought I heard her and Billy quarreling . . ."

"Yes," I said. "I was just reaching for my hat when Creel came in. She'll never sign that contract!"

"Sign it!" echoed Creel. "Why, man, she signed it yesterday!"

And then, when they saw my face, they both began to laugh as though they'd never stop.

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CHAPTER V

CREEL was justified in his belief that Powers would turn the trick, for late next day he got a cable advising him that Mlle. Marguerite Roland had been duly engaged, and would join our party at Marseilles. I judged it was the artistic opportunity which had appealed to her, for the compensation to which she had agreed would seem pitifully small to an American star, even of the second magnitude — though, to be sure, it sounded pretty well in francs.

With that cable, the last cloud was lifted from Creel's spirits. He seemed to have no doubt at all that the girl thus chosen — on the spur of the moment, almost sight unseen! — would make good.

"The old man is scared to death," he confided to me that evening, when I dropped in casually in the hope of seeing Mollie — who wasn't there. "He wants me to take one of these other girls along as an understudy, in case my star falls down. But she won't fall down — I can tell that by looking at her. She's full of grit, and she'll work as long as she can stand on her feet. Besides, she's the type, Billy — the absolute type. It's almost startling! Since I've seen her — and I've had that film run through for me half a dozen times — since I've studied her, I

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feel that I'd rather not make the picture at all than make it with some other woman in the lead. I've told the old man so. He thinks, too," he added, "that we ought to have an extra cameraman; but Digby can do the camera-work, if anything should happen to you."

I knew quite well that Digby could *not* do the camera-work, but I didn't say anything. A good cameraman deserves nearly as much credit for the success of a film as the director — I've seen pictures in which he deserved more. Perhaps some day he will get it. But I'm afraid that day is still a long way off!

With the question of the leading lady settled and out of the way, Creel was able to devote his whole attention to the final preparations. He soon had things humming. The costumes were being made in a shop somewhere uptown, from designs approved by one of the Metropolitan experts, and when they began to be delivered, I saw that Creel had taken the old man's advice not to stint himself. Every member of the company, it seemed, would appear both in modern togs and in those of ancient Egypt, and it was when I learned this that I got the first inkling of what was in Creel's mind. The picture, evidently, was to be built around the idea of reincarnation; and since various directors had been bungling with that idea off and on for years, I knew that,

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if Creel had taken it up, it was because he had discovered some new and startling and convincing way in which to work it out.

Powers was instructed by cable as to the modern dresses for Mlle. Roland, and was also told to see that she got some lessons in English, as none of us knew anything but table-d'hote French. He cabled back that, though she already spoke English quite well, he was giving her a lesson every day while they discussed the gowns, and I could fancy the gay time they were having spending the old man's money! The Egyptian gowns which she was to wear were made in New York with the others, and were left with open seams here and there to be fitted by Ma Creel, who was to act as wardrobe-mistress, after Mlle. Roland had joined the party.

In addition to the costumes, there was a medley of other props — camel trappings, a painted mummy-case, an elaborate Oriental tent, with all sorts of cushions and rugs and fittings. Digby said it reminded him of the old days with the big top, before moving pictures were thought of, when the show ended with a spectacle called The Queen of Sheba. Even there, there had been no mummy! It amused me to see with what pride and tenderness Digby packed that monstrosity away in its case! For me, I was glad to see the last of it. I never looked at it unawares without jumping.

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I had wondered considerably how Creel was managing the Egyptian end of it, for of course an expedition would have to be organized there; but he said nothing about it, and I knew better than to ask questions about what was none of my business. And then one day he told me that he had about decided on his locations, and asked me to go up to the Metropolitan with him and look at some photographs. Even a cameraman's advice, it seems, was worth having!

But even without it, Creel wouldn't have gone wrong. I saw that as soon as I looked at the photographs. There was one of a big, half-finished excavation, with a queer double flight of steps leading down into it, and a row of columns up its centre; there were sections of a wall, and fragments of other ruins; there were great heaps of sand from the excavation; and finally one of the loveliest oases that I have ever seen even in pictures, with groups of slender date palms and gnarled acacias running right down to the edge of the desert.

"How are those for backgrounds?" Creel demanded, triumphantly; and I could only say that they were as nearly perfect as such things could be. "All right," said Creel. "If you approve, we'll go and close the thing up."

So we went over to the office of the director, and I learned of the tentative arrangement Creel had

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made. The Metropolitan, it seems, at the time the war broke out, had an expedition in Egypt in charge of a man named Orlando Davis. He had been excavating the ruins just outside the oasis shown in the photographs; but the English had feared an outbreak on the part of some of the native tribes, and had sent out into the desert after him and compelled him to pack up and come back to a place called Luxor, on the river, where there was a garrison. He had been there ever since, trying in vain to get permission to resume work. The museum had been about ready to recall him and abandon the project until the war was over, when Creel's inquiries suggested a possible combination of forces, if the locations suited.

It didn't take long to complete the arrangements that morning, and instructions were cabled to Davis to get the expedition together, ready to start at a certain date.

"He certainly will be pleased when he gets that message!" said the director, as he sent it off. "We'd have called him home long ago, if he hadn't been so set on staying. He believes he was just at the point of making some important discoveries when the English called him in. He nearly went mad when he found he couldn't go back — he's been moving heaven and earth — wanted us to get the President to interfere. We had given up hope of

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being able to do anything until after the war. How did *you* get permission?"

"There was a wire or two I could pull," answered Creel, with a smile, "and I pulled hard! I'm mighty glad we have been able to get Professor Davis."

"So am I," said the director. "He's a fine fellow — enthusiastic, untiring — and one of the greatest Egyptologists alive."

And with that he bowed us out.

"He'll be immensely valuable," said Creel, as we went down the steps together. "I didn't let on in there, but I don't see how we could get along without him, or somebody like him. He knows how to handle the natives — can talk their lingo and all that. And he'll know what things are worth, and will see that we're not cheated. The agreement is that he's to help in every way he can. In return, we're to turn over to the museum everything we happen to dig up. Not that I expect to dig up anything — we'll waste precious little time doing any real excavating — but they say you never can tell!"

The oasis, it seemed, was two or three days' journey back in the desert from Luxor, where we were to join Professor Davis. Creel had cabled him to provide everything needed for a two-weeks' stay, and to engage the necessary outfit for that length of time. He had specified ten camels and

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fifty natives as his requirements, and the rest he left to Davis. Between the two of them, I suspected that those poor Orientals were in for a strenuous time!

Jimmy Allen, who had been doing some work at Chicago for the Selig people, blew in the day before we were to sail. Creel was closeted with him for nearly an hour, and I suppose gave him some idea of what the picture was to be, for Jimmy came out with his face shining and his big eyes bigger than ever, and I heard him tell Ma Creel that evening that he felt this was going to be his masterpiece. I couldn't help smiling, for I had heard him say the same thing before! None of us guessed how right he was!

The old man had insisted on giving us a send-off, though Creel tried to stop him; and so a long table was set up in the studio, with a shorter one across the top for the guests of honor — which were us! — and all our people were there, and before the evening was over they let themselves go. It was easy enough to sense the undercurrent of emotion — everyone seemed to feel that the affair marked a sort of crisis in our fortunes, and that our whole future depended on our making good. I confess I felt that way myself, and we were all pretty tremulous when we said good-night.

It was good-bye, too, for everybody but the old

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man. The word was passed around that it wouldn't do any good to come down to the boat, since nobody would be admitted to the pier except those who were sailing; but of course the old man managed to get past the guards. All our baggage had to be examined piece by piece before it was put on board, to make sure there were no infernal machines concealed in it — you should have seen the inspector jump when he came to the mummy! — and each of us had to pass a Scottish Rite examination before our passports were O. K'd. and we were permitted to go up the gangplank. It was an Italian boat called the *Caserta*, and she was loaded fore and aft with all sorts of crates and boxes and bags, until there was hardly room for her passengers to walk about the deck; and on either side of the stern was a wicked-looking three-inch gun for the submarines.

It sort of grips one by the throat to look back at little old New York fading into the skyline, as one sails out past the Statue of Liberty. Mollie is a thorough New Yorker, and it seemed to me that this would be an unusually favorable moment to begin my campaign; so I went to look for her, and was surprised and disgusted to find her leaning against the rail, looking as sentimental as anyone could wish, but with an eager young Italian officer on either side of her. She nodded to me so coolly as I approached that I hadn't the nerve to stop, but

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drifted on past, feeling like a despised derelict. I soon found that I was, in fact, a sort of outcast; for Creel and Jimmy got to work at once on the details of the scenario, while Ma Creel and old Digby settled down to endless reminiscences of their circus days; and there was nothing for me to do but sit grouchily in one corner of the smoking-room, and listen to the endless talk about submarines.

There was one fat little man who posed as an authority, who hinted darkly at inside information about a certain dangerous spot just outside Gibraltar —"I'll breathe easier when we've got past *that*, sir!"— and who had invented a life-saving under-vest, which he displayed proudly. It was stuffed with wool or something, and had a pocket for biscuits and another for brandy and a third for letter of credit and other valuables, and if it lost buoyancy for any reason, there was a tube through which to blow it up with air. He averred that he could be quite comfortable in the water for forty-eight hours, and I think he rather wished a submarine *would* take a shot at us.

So did I, at the end of a day or two! For Mollie had apparently forgotten that I was on the ship; when she did see me, it was with an air of mild surprise, as though she was wondering where we had met before; she never appeared in public without a uniform on either side of her — young,

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upstart subalterns, who glared at me coldly and stroked their little silky mustaches superciliously whenever I tried to get past their guard. I wouldn't have minded them so much; but the coldness of the reception I got when I *did* get past simply maddened me! But I knew, if we were submarined, those tin soldiers would be sunk in a minute by the hardware they carried around with them. Then I would be left to rescue Mollie!

That was a happy dream; but I admit my heart jumped when I went out on deck one morning to find the life-boats being swung out and lowered to the level of the rail, and provisioned with biscuit-tins and water-breakers. And back at the stern, I found a gun-crew limbering up the two three-inchers, and my heart jumped again when I saw the case of wicked-looking shells ready at hand on the deck between them. And then, as I started down to breakfast, I discovered an excited crowd around the bulletin-board, and the little fat man was solemnly reading aloud a notice posted there, warning the passengers that the signal to abandon ship would be five short blasts of the steam whistle, telling them what to do when the blasts were sounded, and adding that they were urgently requested to have their life-belts with them at all times, day and night.

It was a rather sober crowd that went in to breakfast, and the sobriety increased when we came

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out half an hour later and found the crew stretching heavy tarpaulins over the deck-house fore and aft, completely enclosing it, so that not a ray of light could escape from either the smoke-room or the music-room. Then later on, when we went down to our cabins, we found that all the ports had been closed and locked and covered with heavy brown paper. And finally, as a finishing touch, we were put through a boat-drill, and every passenger was required to put on a life-belt and have it properly adjusted. The little fat man, who was compelled under protest to put one on over his patent under-vest, certainly presented a striking appearance. But nobody laughed; we all suddenly discovered that this submarine business was not so amusing as it had seemed, and most of us toted a life-belt around with us for the rest of the voyage. It caught one by the throat to see the children playing with their belts beside them, and to think . . .

But we saw no sign of any submarine, not even at that crucial spot outside Gibraltar; and we slipped into the Mediterranean one night as dark as a pocket with everybody sitting on deck grasping a life-belt tightly; and we finally ran safely into the harbor at Marseilles, where we were to change to a P. & O. steamer for Port Said.

Powers was waiting for us on the quay. He took Creel away with him, and I suppose introduced him

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to Mlle. Roland; but we had our hands so full getting our stuff off and convincing the French authorities we weren't German spies, that I had mighty little time to wonder what he was doing. Besides, I had seen the way the two Italian officers bade good-bye to Mollie, and if I had needed anything to think about, I could have thought about that!

The P. & O. boat was due to follow the *Caserta* in — one destroyer had convoyed us both, it seemed — so we didn't have time even to look at Marseilles; though I thought for a while it was destined to be the end of my earthly pilgrimage, for the French seemed determined to send us all to jail and shoot us at sunrise. But just as sentence was about to be pronounced, Powers showed up and straightened things out. It seems he had improved his time while waiting for us by looking up some of the officers he had known in Paris, and, I presume, spending some of the old man's money on their entertainment; but it was surely a good investment, for they rallied to him now, with the result that we finally got our passports stamped, and hurried back to the pier to find that the P. & O. boat was already there.

And then for a while it looked as though they weren't going to let us on the boat; and when they finally agreed to take us, they refused absolutely to take our properties; and then, when they were persuaded that they could find room for them, they in-

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sisted on examining all of them, and I had the hardest kind of work keeping them from cutting open my film-cases to see what was inside. It was at this crisis that my respect for Powers went up about a thousand per cent. He was never flurried, he never had any doubt of the outcome, and as a dispenser of soft-soap he could give the French cards and spades. Well, he finally got everything arranged, and saw our stuff put on board, and waved us up the gang-plank. He certainly must have been glad to see the last of us!

But even before I got on board, I knew what would happen, for I saw some British officers leaning over the rail, staring down at Mollie. And she didn't seem to mind — rather the reverse . . .

All this time I had seen nothing of Creel, which seemed very strange to me, for he wasn't a fellow to shift any of his troubles to other people; but Powers said it was all right — that Creel had left things to him and had gone on board with Mlle. Roland. After I had gone to my room, and made sure my cameras were all right, and got cleaned up, I started on a little stroll about the boat to see what she was like, and when I stuck my head into the lounge, there was Creel having tea with a girl whom I knew at once was our leading lady; and Ma Creel was helping him do the honors. I tried to get away

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before they saw me, but I must have stared an instant, for Creel looked up and caught my eye.

"Oh, there's Billy," he said. "Come here, Billy. I want to introduce you to Mlle. Roland."

Of course I couldn't get away then, so I went in.

"Mlle. Roland," he said, in his best society manner, "permit me to present to you Mr. Lloyd Williams, our cameraman. Everybody calls him Billy," he added, "and I presume that you may."

"Please do!" I said, as the girl looked up and smiled.

And in that first instant I knew that Creel had struck gold! Such eyes, such a mouth — but there, I'm not going to describe her now!

"I am please' to meet M'sieu Beelee," she said, with just enough accent to give piquancy to her talk, and she gave my hand a warm little clasp. I felt somehow that I was going to like Mlle. Roland!

"Is everything all right?" Creel asked.

"Yes," I said; "but we certainly had a strenuous time."

"Oh," said Creel easily, "Powers knew the ropes. He told me I'd just be in the way. So I have been looking after Mlle. Marguerite."

"He has tol' me of the wonderful feelm he has plan'," said the lady. "Iss eet not one grand eeday?" But there — to try to reproduce her ac-

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cent is merely to travesty it! It shall be left hereafter to the reader's imagination.

"I don't know," I said. "Nobody confides in a cameraman, Miss Roland."

"Do they not?" she smiled. "But, *I* will confide in you, M'sieu Beelee."

Her eyes turned me a little dizzy, and before I could collect my wits and stutter a reply, Creel cut in.

"I wish you'd round up the rest of the folks, Billy," he said, "and bring them in here to tea. I want Mlle. Roland to meet them."

"All right," I said, and started out.

The first one I found was Mollie Adams. As I had foreseen, she was leaning over the rail with a British officer on either side of her. Very close on either side.

"Creel wants to see you in the lounge, Mollie," I said, strolling up, casual-like.

Now I leave it to you if there was anything offensive in that; but Mollie glared at me as though I had uttered a deadly insult, and the two chaps with her turned and looked at me as though I were a strange worm of some sort. It made me mad clear through.

"I'd advise you to be quick about it," I went on. "When Creel says a thing he means it," and with that I stalked away with all the dignity I could

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muster. In the bar, I rounded up Digby and Jimmy Allen.

"Come on," I said; "Creel wants you to drink a cup of tea with the new star."

"Have you seen her?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes," I said; "and she sure is a peach. If she can act — phew!"

"Let's hope for the best," said Jimmy. "Creel could teach a wooden Indian to act!" and we three started for the lounge together.

When we got there, I was surprised to find that Mollie had preceded us and was being presented. Then it was our turn. Mollie looked up and saw me — or rather, she didn't see me — she just looked through, around and past me at the opposite wall; and then Creel saw us.

"Come here, Jimmy," he said. "This is Mlle. Roland."

Jimmy's face lighted up with a sort of glow as he saw the girl, and I remember thinking that the woman-hater had been winged at last; and then Mlle. Roland turned with a smile to greet him.

I shall never forget the way in which that smile froze upon her lips, leaving her little white teeth exposed, ready to bite. I shall never forget how the merry light in her eyes blurred out to a stare of horror. I shall never forget the convulsive shiver of abhorrence which ran through her. It was as

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though, looking up casually to greet a friend, she had found a spectre confronting her — a spectre which she had reason to fear and hate.

For an instant she sat quite motionless, as though struck to stone. Then she sprang wildly to her feet.

"I must go ashore," she said, in a voice thick with terror. "I cannot go on. It is impossible!"

And at that moment, we felt the quiver of the boat as the engines started.

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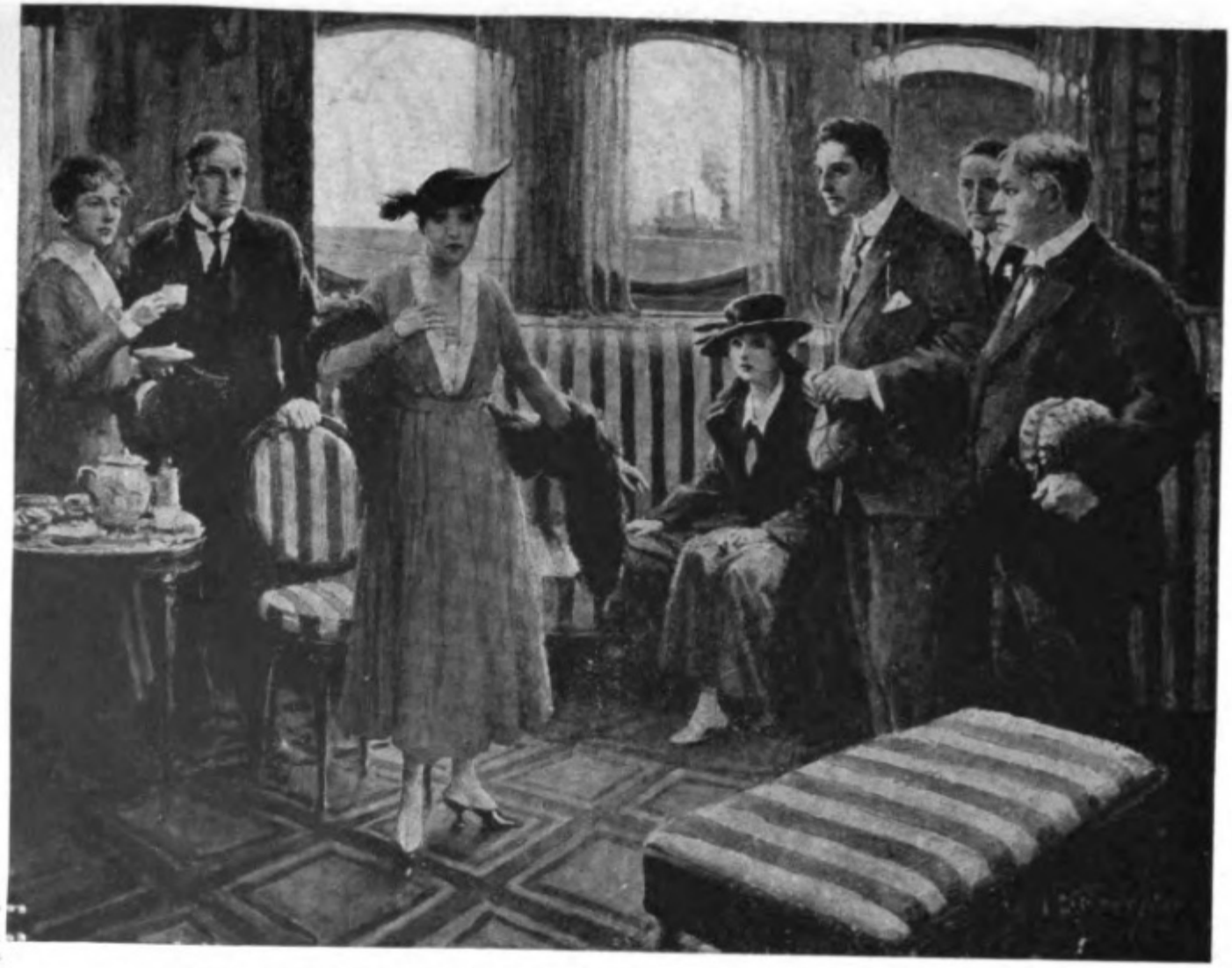

"I must go ashore," she said, in a voice thick with terror.
"I cannot go on. It is impossible!"

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CHAPTER VI

A MAN who had been at the front told me one day that whenever a big shell comes screaming toward the trenches and explodes, there is always a moment of suspended animation, as it were, while the men wait to see whether they are dead or alive. I doubt if any bigger shell was ever exploded than that set off by Mlle. Roland, and I can still see that ring of astounded faces staring at her. By some curious freak of second-sight, my own face is always in that circle!

It was she who first regained some semblance of self-control. She stood a moment bracing herself against the tea-table and swaying a little with the boat; then she smiled, a hard, thin smile, and sank slowly back into her chair.

"A thousand pardons!" she murmured, and passed her handkerchief across her eyes. "I cannot think what came over me — a sudden fear — a longing for flight. I am like that sometimes! Pray forgive me!"

We all tried to pretend, of course, that nothing unusual had happened — that we were quite used to seeing girls leap to their feet at sight of a man and

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try to run away! But we didn't dare look each other in the eyes!

"I didn't know you had met Mr. Allen," said Creel. He had seen her face change as she looked up at Jimmy, but he hadn't caught the full effect of it, as Jimmy and I had.

"I have never met Meestaire Allèn," said Mlle. Roland quickly. "Please present him."

And Jimmy, who had been leaning against a chair, with a face as pale as death, came forward and was presented. Mlle. Roland greeted him cordially, though I noticed that she didn't offer to shake hands, and there was a look at the bottom of her eyes as they met his which made me shiver. I could see by the way she sat there, every nerve tense, how she was struggling for self-control. And there was a little metallic rasp in her voice as she spoke to him which told of fear and abhorrence.

The only guess I could make was that Jimmy reminded her irresistibly of some one whom she hated through and through — hated in a way which made any previous ideas of mine on the subject pale and feeble! Poor Jimmy saw all this too, of course, as clearly as I did, and he excused himself as soon as he could, and crept away like a man who had been caught in the commission of some shameful crime.

There was a moment's silence after he had gone. Then Mollie, after twisting nervously about, excused

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herself on the plea of having her things to unpack; and I could see by the set of her shoulders and the way she held her head as she left the room how thoroughly and absolutely she disapproved of Mlle. Roland.

She apparently forgot all about her unpacking by the time she reached the door, for instead of turning down the companionway, she stepped out on deck, and a few minutes later I saw her pass the window with an officer on either side of her. Mlle. Roland saw her too, and smiled a little to herself; and then she happened to glance at me, and her smile broadened, while I felt my ears burning. But there was nothing malicious in her smile. On the contrary, it was distinctly friendly.

"I, too, should like to walk," she said. "Will you be my companion, M'sieu Beelee?"

"*Will* I!" I said, and jumped to my feet.

"Revoir, Madame — M'sieu," she said with a little bow to Ma Creel and her husband, and in a moment we were out on deck.

Quite naturally Mlle. Roland took my arm.

"I warn you that I am not a great walker," she said; "so if you please, we will stroll slowly; and after that we will sit and talk, and you will correct my pronunciation."

"Correct it!" I said. "I'm more apt to corrupt it! For heaven's sake, don't model your pro-

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nunciation on mine, Miss Roland! People will think you were born in Jersey City!"

"Is not that a nice place to be born?"

"It's an awful handicap," I explained. "One never really outgrows the accent."

"I have not met many Americans," she said, after a moment. "But I have found the men very, very nice."

"And the women?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"The women are too steef — too cold. They have not charm — or, if they have, they are too indolent to employ it."

As I looked down at her, it was evident that she certainly did not lack that quality. She was alluring, provocative, enveloped in feminine atmosphere. And yet I knew that there was not the least danger of my falling in love with her. I am sure she knew it, too; I am sure she hadn't the least desire that I *should* fall in love with her; I am sure she would have held me off and withdrawn herself if she had thought there was any danger. If I read her aright, all she wanted was that I should like her and think her charming. Which I did. Unreservedly.

But of course Mollie Adams, coming past with her two officers, wouldn't know all that, and I suppose the way we were walking *did* look rather confidential. Anyway Mollie stalked past with the faint-

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est of nods — and I didn't care! The officers with her stared enough for a hundred. The cool way in which my companion disregarded them made my heart glad.

"Come, let us sit," she said. "I wish to talk with you."

So I got a steward to place a couple of deck-chairs for us where we could look out over the blue water toward the green-and-gray French coast. It was very beautiful — I had never seen such water and such sunlight; but there — I have to keep reminding myself all the time that this is not a travel-book.

Mlle. Roland sank back into her chair with a sigh of weariness.

"I shall be grateful for a rest," she said. "I have been so hastened, finishing the work I had to do, and preparing for this voyage, that I feel positively — what is your word?"

"Frazzled is the Jersey City word," I said; "but you won't find it in the dictionary."

"Frazzled — yes — but that is an excellent word — it is just like that!" and she moved her hands rapidly around each other. "It was doubtless that which caused me to behave so badly to M'sieu Allèn."

"What was the matter?" I asked. "Seriously, now!"

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"Really, I do not know," she answered slowly. "But when I turned and saw him, I had a sensation — oh, a sensation the most horrible — as of one walking over my grave . . ."

She broke off with a little shiver.

"Yes," I said; "I could tell that by the way you looked. I thought perhaps he reminded you of some one whom you — whom you . . ."

"No," and she shook her head. "He reminded me of no one. It was like a gust out of the past — a chilling gust."

"You sent a shiver over me," I said.

"Did I?" she laughed. "I shall have to rehearse that look. Meestaire Creel hopes that I shall be able to send shivers over my audience!"

"If you look like that, you will!" I assured her.

"I can see that this is a very great opportunity," she went on, more seriously. "Meestaire Creel's confidence in me is what you call . . ."

"Touching," I suggested, as she hesitated.

"Touching — yes; and inspiring. I only hope I shall not disappoint him."

"What is it he wants you to do?" I asked.

"I am to play a double part — a modern woman who revenges herself, half unconsciously, on a man for something very terrible he did to her thousands of years ago. And that is to be shown, too — that

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ancient sin; but it is all in the poem. Have you not seen it?"

"No," I said. "Creel has kept it to himself. He was afraid somebody would steal the idea."

"He need not have been afraid of you!" she protested, and fumbled in her little bag. "He gave me a copy — here it is," and she thrust a folded sheet of paper into my hand.

And for the first time I read,

> Or ever the knightly years were gone
> With the old world to the grave,
> I was a King in Babylon
> And you were a Christian Slave. . . .

And as I read it, the idea behind it loomed larger and larger; I saw that it could be worked up into a ripping picture — and I knew that Creel was the man to do it. Yes; and for the first time I understood why Creel had jumped at Mlle. Roland. She was just the type — absolutely the type — far better, oh, infinitely better than Félice Tabor, who, for all her outré appearance, was inescapably flashy and modern. There was nothing modern about Mlle. Roland except her clothes; and one somehow forgot them when one looked at her . . .

I looked at her now — at her clear olive skin, and black, almond-shaped eyes, and arched lips of vivid red, and short straight nose, and wealth of lustrous hair like a cloud about her face; but it's no

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use — I might go on enumerating forever, and I could never reproduce that effect of mystery, of unutterable things, which her glance somehow imparted. Imagine Cleopatra alive again . . .

"You're just the one for it," I said, a little hoarsely. "You will be tremendous! You'll lift them off their seats!"

"Truly?" she asked, eagerly. "You really think so?"

"You bet I do!" I said. "I know it!"

"I hope you are right," she said, weaving her fingers in and out. "I shall work hard — hard. You see, in Paris, I have made but a small impression — oh, a very small impression! My type is there not unusual, and I have had but little parts. Since the war I have had almost no parts at all — France has more serious work to do! I would have been a nurse — but there are so many women wishing to do that; women who have lost their husbands or their lovers, and who were more in need than I. I do not conceal from you, my friend, that it was at a fortunate moment that jolly M'sieu Powers sought me out."

I guessed something of the tragedy which lay back of those words, so simply spoken. Something grabbed me by the throat, and I was speechless for a moment. But I made up my mind to have a talk

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with Creel, and if she turned out the actress I was sure she would, to see that she got the salary she deserved.

All this time, Mollie and her two officers had been walking around and around; but finally to my surprise she shook them off and sat down not very far away and got out some embroidery. Mlle. Roland saw me staring at this strange spectacle, and looked too, and smiled as though she understood something which I was too dense to see. And then she got up and shook her skirts into place.

"I think I will go to my cabin," she said. "It has been a most pleasant talk. I thank you. You have been kind. I have felt that I could be frank with you."

"Listen," I said. "Whenever you feel that you want to talk, or need any advice or help — or anything of that sort . . . I'm not much account, you know, but such as I am, I'm at your service — always. Creel will tell you I'm a good listener. And a safe one!"

"Thank you," she said, and held out her hand with a friendly little gesture. "I have met one more American who is very, very nice!"

And with that she disappeared indoors.

I sat down again with quite a virtuous glow about my heart. Here was a girl that I could be a brother

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to! No nonsense — just warm friendliness . . .

And then, suddenly, I remembered Mollie, and looked over to where she had been sitting; but she was no longer there.

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CHAPTER VII

HALF an hour later I came across Jimmy Allen scrooched up on a seat in one corner of the smoking-room and looking so utterly miserable that I stopped for a word of comfort. He moved over silently as I sat down.

"Oh, cheer up!" I said.

"It's the way she looked at me," said Jimmy, piteously. "I can't forget it. You saw it."

"Yes," I admitted.

"I never had a woman look at me like that before."

"No," I said; "you've been used to R. S. V. P. eyes and all that. The trouble with you is that you've been spoiled."

"She looked at me as though she hated me," he went on, not heeding me. "By heaven, she *does* hate me!"

"Nonsense!" I said. "It was just nerves. I've been talking to her — she has been working too hard, and you startled her."

"What is there about me to startle her?" Jimmy demanded.

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"I'm sure I don't know," I said. "Neither does she. She laughs at it now."

"Well, *I* can't laugh at it," said Jimmy bitterly. "I never thought that any woman would look at me like that — as though I had done her some deadly injury — something too horrible for words!"

"Oh, piffle!" I protested. "Forget it! She's crazy about the picture."

At thought of the picture, Jimmy groaned softly.

"So am I," he said; "or at least I was. And she's the type — the absolute type; and you've only to look at her to see that she can act. But she won't do it with me — that's evident enough! I'm not going to hold Creel to the contract — I'll tell him to-night; and I'll drop off at the first place the boat touches."

"Oh, no, you won't," I said. "You can't throw Creel that way — not after all he's done for you!"

"Throw him!" echoed Jimmy. "Good God, man, *I'm* not going to throw him — I'm going to save him! It's the greatest idea for a picture I ever heard of, and with that woman it will be a glorious success."

"Well, it will be two glorious successes with both of you," I said. "Come on and get ready for dinner. You'll find that Mlle. Roland has forgotten all about it!"

Jimmy looked at me with those big, burning eyes

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of his, and there was a sort of piteous entreaty in them, as though he'd give his soul to believe, but couldn't.

"Do you really think so?" he asked.

"I know so," I answered, as convincingly as I could. "Look here, Jimmy, I'm in earnest about this. I thought you reminded her of some one she didn't like; but it wasn't even that. It was just a case of nerves, I tell you — of overwork and excitement. She's been having a hard time recently. Now come on!"

He got up slowly and went to his cabin; and I could only hope that I had helped him to forget his troubles. But I didn't blame him for being downhearted; I'd have been downhearted if any girl had looked at me as Mlle. Roland had looked at him. I couldn't forget that look — there was something back of it — something more than nerves . . .

Creel had secured a separate table for us at one side of the saloon, and he and his wife were already there when I arrived. Then Digby came in, and then Mollie, who slid into her seat without so much as glancing my way. Finally Jimmy arrived, and I saw that he had made an exceedingly careful toilet; and we all dallied with the soup and tried to chatter unconcernedly, though we were all wondering whether she would come, and if she did come, what would happen.

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It may be that we were expecting some sort of melodramatic entrance, but she came in quite simply and naturally, as any young girl would, looking perfectly gorgeous in a dinner-gown of some soft, black material, which clung round her like foam. I had never seen such arms, such shoulders, such a neck — neither, I judged, had anybody else in the room, from the way they stared — and her eyes — the way they shone . . .

When Jimmy saw her, he gave one glance and then half-started from his seat as though he was going to make a break for it; but he thought better of it and went on with his soup. I could hear his spoon rattling against his plate.

"I am late!" she said. "A thousand pardons!"

And then she seated herself, and the steward swung her around to the table, and she smiled upon all of us.

"I lie down for a nap," she went on, "and I oversleep! I have been working too hard — yes, that is it. For the first time I find that I have nerves. It was that, M'sieu Allèn, which caused that small contretemps — which I remember with shame, and which I hope you will forget!"

It was said gracefully and lightly, though I knew somehow that she had rehearsed the speech in her stateroom before she came up to us; and there was

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no denying that her smile tightened a little, in spite of her, when she met Jimmy's hungry gaze. It *was* hungry — there is no other word to describe it.

"That is kind of you, Mlle. Roland," he said, with a long sigh of relief he made no effort to suppress. "Of course I shall forget it. I was afraid — I was afraid . . ."

He stopped, seemingly unable to find the proper words, and Mlle. Roland dismissed the subject with a little wave of her hand.

"And you, Mees Adams," she went on, "you have had a pleasant afternoon, I trust?"

"Oh, delightful!" said Mollie shortly.

I looked at her in astonishment. I had never before known Mollie to be rude to anyone but myself. But Mlle. Roland seemed not to notice.

"As for me," she said, "I have had a conversation the most delicious with Beelee," and she smiled at me in a way that made my head swim. "I have unburdened my heart to him — I have told him the story of my life — something I have never before done with a man — at least upon first meeting him! But I feel that I have known Beelee for a long time — that we are old friends. You American men are like that — one looks at them, and one knows them."

"Well, look at me, my dear," said Creel, "and

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don't waste all that sweetness on Billy. He's an unappreciative young cub — besides, he's in love with another girl."

If looks could kill, Creel would have been shriveled to an ash by the glance Mollie cast at him. As for me . . .

"Oh — oh!" cried Mlle. Roland, looking at me with round eyes, as though she had never suspected such a thing. "Yes, I can see it is true! He shall tell me about her — and I shall try to make him less lonely! But you, M'sieu Creel, also . . ."

"Oh, I'm married," said Creel; "to an angel; but that hasn't destroyed my eye for beauty, thank God!"

"Rather enhanced it!" put in Ma Creel. "Go ahead, Miss Roland — I like him to be amused. Only remember, he's Irish!"

"Are Irishmen so dangerous?"

Creel laughed.

"No," he assured her; "on the contrary. My wife means that my bark is far worse than my bite, and that I do a lot of talking through my hat. Get Billy to translate that into English for you," he added, laughing again at her stare of perplexity. "But I'm perfectly serious when I say that is a stunning gown you have on. I must arrange a scene in which you can wear it."

And then he told her that her Egyptian gowns

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were ready except for a little fitting which Ma Creel would attend to before we reached Port Said; and then she and Ma Creel arranged for the fittings, and Ma Creel described the gowns to her in words unbelievably technical while she nodded and clapped her hands like a little girl; and I was so busy watching her that I almost forgot to eat. I happened to glance at Jimmy Allen presently, and saw that he had forgotten to eat, too — though he looked hungry enough, heaven knows — but not for food! And he never said a word — just sat there, drinking in every word and every gesture like a famished man, though she never glanced at him.

I tried to talk with Mollie, after awhile, but she answered only with grunts, when she took the trouble to answer at all, and hurried through her meal and excused herself and made a dash for the door. If it had been our first day out, I'd have thought she was sea-sick; but when I saw one of the officers leave his coffee untasted and dash after her, I understood. Really, I was disgusted with Mollie!

When I got out to the deck, I found her leaning over the rail, with the uniform beside her, staring out at the sea and looking very lovely and sentimental. It made me sick to think of all I had planned for this voyage, and the way it had turned out! I walked around the deck, thinking I might find Mlle. Roland and persuade her to comfort me a little,

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but I saw only Ma Creel and Digby. They were talking over old times as usual — they were all together in a circus, once, Creel and Digby as clowns and Ma Creel as wardrobe mistress — and every so often they got to longing for the smell of the sawdust, the way circus people always do. Digby was a splendid old boy, and I feel I haven't done him justice in this story, but all the time he was somehow outside of it, just looking on.

Most of the passengers on board were British officers on their way to join their commands somewhere in the east. A good many of them were returning after having been invalided home wounded, and of course they were full of their experiences, and so everybody crowded into the smoking-room, which fairly sizzled with war-talk, and submarine talk. There were actually two or three of them who had been submarined and lived to tell the tale, and what I had heard on the subject crossing the Atlantic wasn't a circumstance to what I heard now. The Mediterranean, it seemed, was swarming with U-boats, and they were making a special effort to get the liners. A sister-ship of the one we were on had been sunk a week or so before with a loss of eighty lives. It was well-known that the Germans had sworn to get our boat, too. The pessimists were sure they *would* get it, probably on this voyage; others, more optimistic, pinned their faith

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When I got out to the deck, I found her leaning over the rail, with the uniform beside her, staring at the sea and looking very lovely and sentimental. *See page 75.*

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on the big naval gun mounted at the stern, with a crew always on duty. Life-preservers were much in evidence, and I need hardly say that the precautions against a ray of light betraying us at night were even more stringent than on the *Caserta*.

They were so stringent, in fact, that the air in the smoking-room finally became unbreathable, and I went out to take another look for Mlle. Roland. But by this time, it was dark as a pocket on deck, and after blundering into two or three people and falling over somebody's feet, I was about to give it up and go to bed, when some impulse caused me to stick my head into the saloon, and there was Creel and Jimmy and the girl in one corner, with Creel waving his hands and talking. I drifted up, casual-like, and as he nodded and didn't tell me to go away, I sat down and listened.

He was talking about the picture, of course, and there was a pile of criss-crossed manuscript on the table in front of him.

"The first time you see her," he was saying to Jimmy, "is in the slave-market. She's a princess — has been captured somewhere in the interior — we'll show the raid on the village, and the death of her father defending her, and all that, of course. Digby can do the father. And then she is dragged away, and brought down the river and put on the slave-market. As you happen to be passing through,

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you see her — in chains, half-naked, and mad enough to kill herself — ready to, in fact, the first chance she gets, because she knows perfectly well the fate in store for her. We'll get a great scene out of that first meeting."

Jimmy's eyes were glowing.

"I oughtn't to see her in the slave-market," he said. "A princess would never be offered for sale like that — not until the king had had a chance at her. How would this do: I've sent one of my generals to conquer her father, who is an independent old scout and has given me a lot of trouble; and my general kills the old king by treachery, and takes his daughter captive, and brings her to me as a sort of offering. And I can tell by the way she looks at me, when she is brought in, that she isn't conquered, and it occurs to me that it would be a pleasant and exciting game to break her spirit, so I order her away to the harem, and get me a whip — a particularly heavy and savage whip, which will cut her flesh to ribbons . . ."

"Great!" broke in Creel. "Don't you think that's better?" he added, turning to the girl.

She was staring at Jimmy with wide-open eyes, in which I saw again that look of horror. Jimmy saw it, too, and went as pale as ivory.

"If Mlle. Roland prefers it the other way," he stammered.

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But the look had passed and she was herself again in an instant, though her face, too, was very pale.

"Oh, no," she said quickly. "Your idea is splendid. It sounds as though — as though — it might have happened!"

"That's just it!" said Creel. "That's just the way it struck me — and that's the way I'll fix it. Now the next scene . . ."

Mlle. Roland passed her hand wearily before her eyes.

"If you do not mind," she began.

"Of course not," Creel broke in. "I forgot you were tired. Forgive me! We've plenty of time to work it out."

"Then," she said, "if you are sure you do not mind, I think I will go to bed."

We bade her good-night and watched her as she disappeared through the door. Then Creel waved us away.

"You two boys run along," he said, and turned to his manuscript.

Jimmy was very silent as we walked back along the deck together.

"Did you see it?" he asked at last.

"See what?" I demanded.

"That look," he said.

"Of course I saw it," I said savagely. "She was feeling the scene — she's an actress through and

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through — full of temperament. That's the way she'll look at you when you order her to the harem . . ."

I didn't really believe it. I felt there was something back of it I didn't understand. But it wouldn't do to let Jimmy think so. So I rattled on as convincingly as I could. At the end, Jimmy shook his head doubtfully.

"Maybe you're right," he said, at last; "but I have a feeling . . ."

He stopped and seemed to ponder something at the back of his mind. Then he shook his head again.

"No; it's impossible," he said.

"What's impossible?" I asked.

"That I should have met her before," he answered, and stalked away to his room without bidding me good-night.

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CHAPTER VIII

THERE are two kinds of directors in the motion-picture business.

The first, and oldest, and commonest kind believes in doing all the head-work himself. He never tells his actors anything of the story as a whole, or consults them in any way. He gets them together, places them in the various scenes, tells them what he wants them to do, rehearses them till they do it to his satisfaction, and then tells his cameraman to shoot. So the actors go through scene after scene without in the least knowing why. Sometimes they never know what it is all about until they see the completed picture on the screen.

There are a good many arguments for this method, the principal one being that moving-picture actors, for the most part, depend on the outside of their heads rather than the inside — in other words, they make their living by their looks, not by their brains, and the only way for the director to get the results he is working for is to treat them like a lot of cattle. And then, since it is almost always impossible to take the scenes consecutively as they occur in the story, it is consequently impossible to build up the action

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and emotion from scene to scene, as is done in a play. Every scene has to be worked out independently of the others, and the director is the only one who can look at it objectively and judge of its effect.

The great objection is that, under such conditions, the acting is almost certain to be wooden; and in the effort to get away from this, there are a few directors who like to sit down with their actors before they begin a production, and talk the thing over, so that the actors will understand the story and be able to use in the various scenes such intelligence as they possess. There are also, quite recently, a few actors with sufficient self-respect to insist on reading the scenario as a whole before they go into it. I am inclined to think that it is with these actors and these directors that the future of the motion-picture business lies.

Creel could be as autocratic as any director in the game; but he could also recognize intelligence when he saw it, and he preferred intelligence to stupidity. He wasn't afraid of it, as I am inclined to think some of the others were; and he was always anxious for criticisms and suggestions; discarding them instantly, if they were worthless, as was usually the case; weighing carefully any that possessed a grain of merit, and laboring ceaselessly to get from his material every ounce of possibility.

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So, in the days that followed, he spent a good deal of time with Jimmy and Mlle. Roland, gradually building up the picture. Both of them seemed to have a sort of sympathetic insight into what he was trying to do, and Creel was very much elated at the progress he was making.

He had, of course, worked out the plot in a general way before we left New York, and the main lines of the story were not to be changed, but the particular way in which this or that effect could be best secured was the subject of endless discussion. It was in these small twists and touches that Creel delighted; they were to him what style is to the writer; they gave his pictures an individuality all their own. And both Jimmy and Mlle. Roland entered heartily into his spirit.

Ma Creel and Digby sat listening most of the time, and I would drift up now and then, and occasionally Mollie would tear herself away from her officers and stand behind Mlle. Roland's back and glare at her; but it was very seldom any of us contributed anything to the discussion. In fact most of the time, it was entirely beyond our depth. I wasn't surprised that Creel should know a lot about ancient Egypt, for he knew a lot about everything, and of course he had been reading up; but where the other two got their knowledge, I couldn't understand. It wasn't exactly knowledge, either — it was

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a sort of intuition — just a flash now and then; but I dare say it was worth more to Creel than any amount of mere knowledge would have been.

It had been decided, after all, to have the slave market, with Mollie as the principal slave, and to introduce Mlle. Roland later on in the way Jimmy had suggested. Creel was anxious to show Jimmy in his first incarnation in an aspect so repellant that the audience would be eager to see him get what was coming to him later on; so Mollie was to be treated in the most ruthless way, her spirit broken, her body tortured — business with the whip! — till reason left her and she was driven out into the desert to die. Then would come the other woman's turn; but hers would prove to be a spirit as strong as her master's, and the struggle between the two was to provide the dramatic interest for the third reel, culminating when the woman, overcome by a passion she had struggled against in vain, threw herself at her conqueror's feet, and begged for love. And he, fighting back an impulse to stoop and raise her, stamped her into the dust and turned away with a laugh of contempt.

I admit that doesn't sound much better than the summaries I have scorned, but the way Creel described it, and the way Jimmy and Mlle. Roland looked at each other as they imagined the action, was enough to give one the shivers. These long discussions had brought them nearer together, in a way;

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they talked without constraint, almost with friendliness; and yet there was something strange in the way they sometimes eyed each other — a sort of half-frightened, half-fascinated curiosity. It reminded me of two wrestlers manœuvering for a clinch. And sometimes I would see that hungry look come into Jimmy's eyes; and so would the girl; and then her face would freeze over with a film of ice, and she would visibly draw into herself.

For in spite of the fact that her aversion seemed to have vanished, Mlle. Roland held steadily aloof from him. They never walked together or sat together or talked together unless Creel was present, and the talk then was entirely about the picture. When she did any walking, it was with me, and I was mighty glad of her company. In fact, if it hadn't been for her, I'd have been pretty lonesome, for Mollie seemed farther away and more inaccessible than she had ever been.

Well, we plowed on eastward with perfect weather, zigzagging back and forth by day and wrapping ourselves in darkness by night. We sighted a warship, now and then, or a freighter loaded deep with munitions, but never a submarine; and then one morning, as I was looking over the side, I saw that the water had changed from deep blue to a sort of yellowish-green, and somebody said it was the Nile water pushing out into the sea; and

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pretty soon a tall lighthouse was in sight, and then a lot of masts and funnels, and then a huge breakwater surmounted by a ridiculous statue in a frock-coat, which somebody else said represented de Lesseps; and almost before we could see the flat shore, we had passed the harbor entrance and were at Port Said.

Previous to this, everybody who was going to get off there had been summoned before an officer with the coldest eyes I ever saw and put through the third degree as to his business, antecedents and moral condition, and all this information had been carefully written down; and we were then lined up, checked off, and delivered to a guard on the pier, who marched us off to be examined again by the port authorities. But there wasn't half the trouble I had anticipated. Creel had his letter from the ambassador at Washington and a lot of other documents ready to spring, but he didn't need them. Those officers didn't seem to be half as afraid of spies and bombs and such things as the people back home had been. They just looked at our passports and then looked at us — especially at Mollie and Mlle. Roland — and told us to run along. I suppose they knew all about us before we arrived. And I heard afterwards that the Russian successes against the Turks had made an attack on the canal so improbable that the regulations had been loosened up a bit.

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The train for Cairo didn't leave for about two hours, and Mlle. Roland insisted that I take her for a walk through the native quarter. I asked Mollie if she wouldn't like to go, too; but she said she wouldn't, as she really didn't care for pig-pens. It wasn't so bad as that, but it was pretty bad, and I was astonished at the way Mlle. Roland enjoyed it. Her eyes were shining like stars and her lips were red as poppies, and she sniffed the air with distended nostrils as though it contained some delicious perfume of which she couldn't get enough. I had scented it long before we got ashore — a peculiar, penetrating odor — a compound of flowers and spice and filth and human sweat — the smell of the East. It seemed to me pungent and rather overpowering, and the natives shuffling along the streets were the dirtiest humans I had ever seen, but my companion looked at them with positive rapture, and didn't seem at all disturbed by their vociferous begging.

"You certainly *do* seem at home!" I said, at last.

"It is curious, is it not," she assented, "but I feel as though I belonged here among these people."

"Nevertheless, I wouldn't let them crowd too close," I said, and poked a verminous old beggar with my cane. "The whole place smells like a circus."

And indeed there was in the air something of that

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fetid odor of strange animals. But Mlle. Roland declared it was delightful, and when we finally pulled away in the train, she stared out in ecstasy at a landscape which seemed to me extremely depressing.

The railway was a narrow-gauge affair, running right along the bank of the canal, an uninspiring ditch about a hundred yards wide filled with muddy water. There were a number of battleships in it, and on the other side, as far as the eye could reach, were the round white tents of the expeditionary force — enough of them, so it seemed to me, to shelter the whole British army — and guns, and great piles of supplies, and herds of camels. There were some officers in the car with us, and they just laughed when I asked them if they thought the Germans by any chance could capture the canal.

We came at last to a dinky little town whose name I never knew, and there we changed to a real train, and Creel and Digby checked up our baggage, to be sure we hadn't lost anything, and in a few minutes we were off to Cairo. It was swelteringly hot, and a fine white sand was continually filtering in from somewhere, though the country we traversed was green and fertile-looking, with nothing of the desert about it. And we all grew very cross and uncomfortable. All, that is, except Mlle. Roland. She had taken to Egypt as a duck to water. Jimmy,

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whom I had suspected of an Oriental strain, was as miserable as any of us, and I concluded that he was pure Irish!

It was not until we were nearing Cairo that Creel imparted the cheerful news that we were not to stop there, but were to go straight on to Luxor. That, it seemed, had been one of the conditions of our being allowed to enter Egypt at all. I don't know what it was the English feared we might discover at Cairo; all that we *did* discover was that a very fair dinner may be had at the station, which isn't in the town at all; and then we were bundled into a special sleeping-car, and the long trip up the Nile began. I had always thought of Egypt as a small, one-horse country, and I was astounded to learn that Luxor is five hundred miles from the sea, and that it is only about a third of the way to Khartum!

It was evening as we pulled out of the station at Cairo, but we caught a glimpse of the shadowy mass of the pyramids on the right before the night shut down; and then Creel, who was like a war-horse scenting battle, got out his scenario and summoned Jimmy and Mlle. Roland to sit by him, and began to talk and talk. Jimmy was too tired to do more than nod now and then; but the girl was fairly glowing with eagerness, and there was a light in her eyes as she listened to Creel that I couldn't understand. It couldn't have been caused by anything he was say-

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ing, heaven knows! It was as though she saw at hand, about to be realized, some supreme moment for which she had been waiting all her life!

Ma Creel and Mollie and old Digby had gone to their berths long ago, and the only thing that kept me awake was a peculiarly vile Egyptian cigar in which I had invested at Cairo and which I was struggling to consume. I gave it up, at last, and threw the frayed, rope-like fragment out of the window; and just then Jimmy's head dropped sideways, and he opened his eyes to find Creel looking at him reproachfully.

"It's no use, old man," Jimmy murmured; "can't keep my eyes open a minute longer."

"All right," said Creel; "go to bed, all of you."

Mlle. Roland didn't look in the least sleepy, but she rose obediently, and said good-night, and rustled away toward the women's end of the car, while Jimmy and I turned gratefully toward ours. And I was asleep almost before I touched my pillow.

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CHAPTER IX

WE were four hundred miles up the Nile when I awoke next morning, and running close beside the bank of that historic river. I confess I was disappointed in it, and the squalid little mud villages strung along it did not seem fit for anything but pigs. I had heard a good deal about Egypt's progress under English rule, but it must have been in some other line than house-building. The home of the average Egyptian, so far as I was able to observe it, consists of four low mud walls, a straw roof about as water-tight as a sieve, and a mud floor. There is a hole for a door, and sometimes one or two others for windows, and inside are a few earthenware pots and wooden dishes, and a pile of dung for fuel, and thousands of flies — not to mention other vermin . . .

We crossed the river on a long iron bridge, while we were eating breakfast, and presently we ran past some most amazing ruins, and then we were at Luxor.

As we piled out of the carriage, a thin little man, wearing a big white helmet and with very bright eyes and eager face half-concealed by a snow-white

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beard, hastened toward us, and instinctively addressed himself to Creel.

"This is Mr. Creel?"

"Yes," said Creel.

"I am Davis," said the little man, and the two shook hands. "I have everything ready."

"Good," said Creel. "When can we start?"

"We can start this evening," Davis answered, looking at him with a certain anxiety.

"Good," said Creel again. "We'll be ready."

The little man's face brightened instantly.

"Mustafa! Mustafa!" he shouted, and a black-bearded pirate, wearing a dark blue turban and long black burnous, who had been hovering in the offing, strode forward. "This is Mustafa, our dragoman," Davis explained, and Creel nodded to the pirate, eyeing him admiringly. I knew he had already placed him in the picture. "We start two hours before sundown," Davis continued to the dragoman, who bowed.

"All will be ready, saar," he said.

"You will see that the luggage is attended to," continued Davis, and indicated the impressive pile of our belongings, which had come up in the car with us and were now assembled on the platform.

"I will tell Digby to make certain that nothing is overlooked," said Creel. "There isn't a thing there we don't absolutely need."

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"Mustafa is very careful — the best dragoman in Luxor," said Davis, while Mustafa grinned with pleasure, disclosing a formidable row of very white teeth. "But of course it will do no harm to check him up."

Whereupon Creel called Digby forward and introduced him; and then he introduced the rest of us, and Professor Davis shook hands hastily all around and said he was very glad to meet us; but his thoughts evidently were far away — out in the desert, I suppose, about that excavation of his . . .

Only when he came to Mlle. Roland was his interest aroused. The quick glance he shot her from his keen little eyes was almost startled; but it faded in a moment, as though he had decided she was not worth while, after all, and he turned back to Creel.

"The ladies will wish to go to an hotel for the day, of course," he said. "A part of the Hotel de Luxor is still open; it is but a step — this way," and we trailed along behind him, with a crowd of beggars and dirty children clamoring beside us till we reached the entrance to the hotel grounds. "There has been no tourist traffic this season," Davis went on, "and the other hotels are closed. But M. Pagnon has managed to hold on. Cook's own the hotel, and I suppose it was a matter of pride to keep it open. As soon as the ladies are settled, I should like you to see the caravan. I think you will find it

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satisfactory; fifty men and ten camels, as you suggested. I had hard work getting the camels. The British have commandeered every one they could lay their hands on. These have been commandeered but not yet delivered, and their owner is making a little extra money renting them to us. I had to agree that we would pay for any that died or was injured."

"That was all right," Creel agreed. "I don't see why any of them should die."

"They won't — but there's a superstition that it is bad for a camel to photograph it — kills its soul, or something like that. Some of the natives are a little trembly about standing in front of a camera, but they won't object if they can move about, as that breaks the spell. I couldn't get any horses — the British swept them all up right at the start; but I got a good strong donkey for each of us. And supplies for two weeks. You said two weeks, I think?"

There was a feverish eagerness about Davis, as though he feared he might awake at any moment and find all this a dream; and he looked at Creel as though he would like to pinch him and make sure he was really there.

"Oh, yes," said Creel. "Two weeks will be ample. How long does it take to get to this oasis?"

"Two days. We start this evening and travel till midnight. Then we rest till an hour before sun-

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rise, and start again, and push on to a watering-place, which we should reach about ten o'clock. We will rest there during the heat of the day, and start again as soon as it is cool enough. If the ladies are not too fatigued, we will push on till we reach the oasis."

"It sounds pretty strenuous," Creel commented.

"We can, of course, take another day, if necessary," said Davis. "You will find the oasis very pleasant."

"The photographs looked promising," said Creel.

"They didn't do it justice — they couldn't," protested Davis, eagerly. "And the ruins are splendid. I was just getting properly into them, when the government ordered me back to the river. There were some bands of Arabs about, and they were afraid I'd be attacked. I didn't think there was any danger, and offered to take all the risk and responsibility of staying; but they wouldn't listen. The British are a bull-headed race — it's no good arguing with them. I found that out. I was nearly wild! It almost made me pro-German!"

"What happened to the Arabs?" questioned Creel.

"Oh, they were captured or driven back into the desert," Davis hastily assured him. "They never got anywhere near this part of Egypt — there was never really any danger. But I couldn't get permis-

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sion to go back — Lord knows, I tried! How *you* got it, I can't imagine. `Not that I care," he added quickly, seeing Creel's cryptic smile. "It's enough for me that you *did* get it. But the commandant here was certainly astonished when the order came!"

We were at the hotel by this time, and M. Pagnon greeted us with a warmth which told of many empty rooms; but he was desolated when he learned it was only for the day! The women decided they would rest till afternoon and then visit the ruins. Creel and I went off with Davis to take a look at the caravan.

"I am glad you are ready to start at once," Davis said, as we threaded our way through the town. "I was afraid you might wish to remain here for a time. But every day, more and more sand must be drifting into my excavations, and the sooner we get to work there the better."

"You understand, of course," Creel pointed out drily, "that what we have come to Egypt for is to take pictures, not to dig up buried cities."

"Certainly, I understand; certainly," Davis assured him. "That was made very clear in the letters from the Museum. But so little remains to be done there, that I am sure there will be time . . ."

His voice trailed away nervously, and he walked on with bent head, pulling abstractedly at his beard.

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It was evident that Davis was interested considerably more in his excavations than in our picture — which was natural enough! — but he certainly had got a good caravan together, as we found when we reached the camp — fifty of the most picturesque scoundrels I have ever seen, a herd of ten camels, a dozen donkeys, and as many goats.

"What are the goats for?" Creel demanded. "I'm not going to eat goat."

"They are principally for the milk," Davis explained. "They are very necessary."

Creel grunted skeptically. The smell of the goats was not alluring.

"Couldn't we take some condensed milk?" he asked.

"Goat's milk is much better — you will see. Of course, I can get some condensed milk, if you wish. But we will need the goats for the natives — they are very fond of the milk when it is sour; they will go with us more cheerfully and work better if they know they are to get some, now and then. It is a luxury for them."

"Well, it isn't for me," said Creel; "but I suppose you know best. Is there any danger of these cut-throats murdering us some night?" he added, casting his eyes over the motley crowd.

"Oh, not at all," answered Davis, with a smile. "They have been selected very carefully. They

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are all good workers, and vouched for by Mustafa."

I was going to inquire who vouched for Mustafa, but at that moment that worthy himself came hurrying forward, his face wreathed in smiles, one hand against his heart, to welcome us to the camp. He showed us about as proudly as though he were Barnum exhibiting his circus. It was a good deal like a circus, and I reflected that Digby and Ma Creel, at least, ought to be happy!

I had never realized how much dunnage it took to maintain a party two weeks in the desert, and I was pretty sure that Creel hadn't, either, from the way he stared at it. It was all spread out for final inspection before being packed up, and there was certainly an awful lot of it. There was a sleeping-tent for the men and another for the women; a tent for a dining-and-living-room, and another to serve as a store-room for our supplies. And when I looked at the supplies, I was reminded of the photographs I had seen of the British supply base at Gallipoli.

"Do you mean to say that ten camels can carry all of this stuff?" Creel demanded.

"Oh, vurry easy, saar," Mustafa assured him.

"Each man can carry a hundred pounds," Davis explained. "I don't think our packs will run over sixty. A lot of this stuff is bulky, but not very heavy."

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At that moment Creel's eye fell upon a great pile of flat wicker baskets with rope handles.

"What are those for?" he asked.

"It is in those the sand is carried from the excavation," Davis explained. "They are very light," he added, "and two men can carry the lot of them. If you are really going to have pictures of excavating," he went on, for Creel's face was rather grim, "you've got to have the implements to do it with."

"I suppose that's so," Creel assented; "but don't overdo it, Professor. What did all this stuff cost?"

"About twenty-five hundred dollars. The war has run the price up on a good many things. I have the inventory, if you care to check it over."

"No," said Creel, running his eye over the outfit; "I can see it's worth every cent of that. What do we pay these brigands?"

"Four piastres a day."

"How much is a piastre?"

"About five cents."

"What?"

"A piastre is about five cents — they get about twenty cents a day."

"Hum—m-m!" commented Creel. "No labor unions in Egypt, evidently!"

"They get their board, too, of course," Davis added.

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"The stuff they eat is included in the twenty-five hundred?"

"Oh, certainly! They do not require a great deal. The camels, tents, donkeys, and camp dunnage will cost a thousand dollars for the two weeks — pro rata if we stay longer. And Mustafa will expect a present if everything goes well," he added in an aside; "say a hundred dollars."

"I think I can run to that, if he makes good," said Creel. "My compliments, Professor. I knew from the first that you would be a good investment."

"Oh, I know the ropes," said Davis. "They know they don't dare try to overcharge me. Besides, this is a bad season, and they're glad to get a job at any price. If you're satisfied, I'll tell them to begin to pack up."

"All right," said Creel; "I don't know why I shouldn't be satisfied."

Davis nodded to the waiting Mustafa, and a moment later one would have thought a riot had broken out in the camp, as the laborers, under Mustafa's eye, began to pack the supplies. Creel walked over to where old Digby was perched like a sentinel on our pile of baggage.

"Is all the stuff here?" he asked.

"Every piece," said Digby, with satisfaction; "and I'm going to stay by it and see that none of it gets away."

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"That's right," Creel commended; "and keep the film cases under cover. This sun is something fierce."

Digby nodded and resumed his seat.

"We can start, I think, at five o'clock," said Davis, as we prepared to depart. "I should like to show the ladies about the ruins, but I have so much to do, that I'm afraid . . ."

"That's all right," Creel broke in. "They can get a guide at the hotel. Besides, Billy here is available — cameramen never have anything to do! Not that he knows anything about ruins, but that doesn't matter! You run back to the hotel, Billy," he added, "and make yourself useful. I think I'll stay here with Digby awhile."

And so it presently happened that, accompanied by a guide secured by M. Pagnon, I sallied forth with the women to visit the Temple of Luxor, which stands close to the river not far from the hotel. I should like to say something about that temple, and about the ruins at Karnak, to which we drove an hour later; but they have nothing to do with this story, and besides they have been described by far more competent pens than mine; only I came away from them with a considerably more exalted opinion of the ancient Egyptians than of the modern ones. They certainly knew how to build! I had never im-

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agined that such ruins existed anywhere on earth . . .

Creel took a short look at them, too, with an eye for possible locations for some of the later scenes of his picture, and at four o'clock — tearing ourselves away from the Commandant and two aides who had called and were making themselves very agreeable indeed! — we all sat down to the last meal we should eat amid civilized surroundings for some time. We were a little thoughtful and silent; this trip into the desert, seen thus close at hand, loomed up as considerably more formidable than it had appeared from New York! I think even Creel was just a little nervous over it. But he pretended to take it as all in the day's work; and the rest of us followed his lead as well as we could. Then Davis was at the door with two carriages; M. Pagnon, from the steps, wished us a pleasant journey and safe return; and we drove away toward the camp.

Long before we reached it, we were aware of a hideous uproar — a vibrant squealing, as though a hundred pigs were being killed at once; and Mollie, who was in my carriage, edged a little closer to me.

"What *is* that terrible noise?" she quavered.

Davis laughed as he saw her alarmed countenance.

"They're loading the camels," he explained; and then we drove into the camp, and I saw that every camel, crouched upon its belly on the ground, was

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protesting at the top of its voice as the natives tightened the straps which secured its load. I never knew that a camel could yell so loud.

"The poor things!" protested Mollie. "Those brutes are killing them!"

But Davis only laughed again; and indeed we found out later that a camel yells just as loud when its load is being taken off as when it is being put on. I suppose the camel thinks it is part of the game!

Then the carriages stopped, and Mustafa hurried forward and helped the ladies to alight. His brown face was shining with excitement.

"All is ready," he announced, and the donkeys were led up, and the saddles adjusted; and pretty soon we filed out eastward toward the hills which border the Arabian desert.

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CHAPTER X

We formed a picturesque procession — picturesque, at least, to the eyes of a New Yorker — and also not without a certain impressiveness. At our head, very upright and dignified in his blue turban, rode Mustafa, as befitted a master of ceremonies, his aquiline nose scenting, as it were, first in one direction and then in another, and sublimely unconscious of the rabble which looked on or ran beside us clamoring for money. Behind him came the camels, stalking slowly and majestically along as though on parade, with legs that seemed bowed outward by the weight of their immense packs, looking out upon the world from under half-lowered lids with a gaze melancholy and resigned. Each camel was led by one of our ragged pirates, and others led the goats and extra donkeys, while the remainder of the crew trudged along behind, bending under their packs, but apparently cheerful enough, for there was a continual flutter of talk running through their ranks.

The tail of the procession was its least impressive portion; but I defy any one to look impressive when mounted on a beast so small that one has to hold up

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one's legs to keep them from dragging on the ground! It seemed like cruelty to animals to ride such beasts at all; and then I looked at Mustafa, who weighed twice as much as I did and whose donkey was even smaller than mine, and my conscience grew more reconciled. I resolved to ask Mustafa, at the first opportunity, what he did with his legs.

So, zigzagging along a narrow road which mounted gently toward a low range of hills, we crept away eastward; and the natives trailing along in front of us reminded me of a company of the damned, with their burdened backs and their fluttering brown cloaks and their shaven heads glistening beneath their skull caps.

As we rode along, Davis strove to entertain us by pointing out various things of interest — the hills, a mile or two away across the river, honeycombed with the entrances to the tombs of the Kings; the high-water mark of the last inundation; the mighty mass of Karnak; the mud village which marked the end of the arable land — and also, thank heaven, of the beggars! — but I scarcely listened. For the most wonderful thing of all was that I should be here, in this company, riding away into the desert. As I looked around, I saw the same wonder in the eyes of all the others. That we should be here, riding away into the desert — to furnish an evening's

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amusement for a lot of people who knew nothing of Egypt and cared less! Ridiculous!

We threaded a narrow pass between two low scraggly hills, and quite suddenly we came out upon the desert. It stretched away and away to the horizon, one ridge of sand behind another, like waves of a frozen sea, trackless and illimitable, waiting to engulf us. It daunted me — it overawed me; to venture into it seemed to be courting death; how we could ever hope to find the oasis — a pin-point amid this waste — I could not imagine. I wanted to stop and think it over.

But Mustafa, without drawing rein, plunged on; I saw the showers of sand as the camels plowed along behind him; then the natives were ankle-deep in it; and suddenly my donkey's feet were cushioned and silenced, and we rode on as noiselessly as a company of phantoms.

A moment later, I was conscious of the heat — as though we were riding straight through the door of a white-hot oven. The sun was sinking toward the hills behind us; it was from the sand the heat mounted — mighty waves of it. The helmet which Creel had given me felt clumsy and heavy; my clothes seemed to weigh me down; the heat of the donkey penetrated the saddle; my legs began to ache . . .

Creel looked around at Davis anxiously.

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"I don't know whether the women can stand this," he said.

"Oh, yes, we can!" protested Ma Creel, smiling bravely, though her face was purple. "It's my poor donkey I pity!"

"It will be cooler very soon," said Davis. "We will get the breeze from the sea as soon as the sun is a little lower."

"Which sea?" asked Creel.

"The Red Sea," Davis answered. "It's about a hundred miles away, over there to the east."

The Red Sea, Pharaoh, the children of Israel! So we were really here in this land which was old before the rest of the world was born! I looked around again, with a little in-taking of the breath. And just then, I felt on my forehead the first hint of coolness, gentle as a kiss.

"Look at the sky!" said Ma Creel suddenly, and, looking up, I saw for the first time, the wonders of a desert sunset . . .

An hour later, we dismounted for a short rest and a cup of tea, which Davis and Mustafa brewed for us on a little alcohol stove. It was very strong and black, and flavored with goat's milk, and we tasted it somewhat gingerly — and found it delicious! There was never any protest about goat's milk after that! Then we tried to talk, but we were all too immersed in wonder . . .

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A little distance away, among the camels and goats and donkeys, the natives sat crouched around some wooden vessels filled with a greasy mess, into which they dipped pieces of greenish bread, eating with great gusto . . .

As we sat there, the desert turned suddenly to beaten gold, as the sun sank behind the hills to the west; and then a weird chant rose among the natives; and we turned to see them apparently washing their hands with sand and bowing toward the east.

"Maghrib," said Davis in answer to our look. "The Muslim always prays just after sunset," he added, seeing we did not understand; "it is called Maghrib."

"What sort of prayer do they say?" asked Ma Creel, who was very religious in her own way, and who was watching the ceremony with evident awe.

"They recite a verse from the Koran, usually — a good deal like our Lord's prayer."

"But Mustafa isn't praying," someone pointed out; and indeed there sat Mustafa with his legs crossed, a little apart, calmly smoking a cigarette and looking at the kneeling crowd with an air distinctly disdainful.

"Mustafa is a Copt, and therefore a Christian," explained Davis. "You can tell that from his blue

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turban and black burnous. And the Copts despise the Muslims."

"Yes — just look at Mustafa," said Creel. "I wonder those fellows don't mob him. But go ahead, professor, and tell us some more. What is a Copt, anyway?"

"The Copts are probably the direct descendants of the ancient Egyptians," explained Davis obligingly. "Mustafa is a good type — look at his profile — he might have stepped right off an ancient monument — while the fellahin there are of a more or less negroid type. When the Arabs conquered Egypt, they persecuted the Copts in every way they could think of — among other things, forcing them to wear dark colors as a mark of their inferiority. They can wear any kind they want to now, of course; but they still stick to the dark clothes — they take a pride in them."

"Like the Beggars of Holland — and Gothic architecture — and all that," supplemented Creel; and Davis nodded, with a glance of surprise that a mere moving-picture man should know anything about such matters.

But the prayer was ended, and Mustafa, taking a last long pull at his cigarette, threw it away, rose and came toward us.

"We will go on, if you please, saars," he said;

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and summoned two boys to clear away the tea-things; and in a few minutes we were again in the saddle.

Quite suddenly the color faded from the sky, darkness fell, and the stars leaped out. Leaped is the only word for it — and such stars! Our caravan became a line of shadows, drifting across the desert without a sound.

Involuntarily we drew closer together, and I somehow found myself riding by Mollie's side. Her face was only a white blur in the darkness, but it seemed to me friendlier than it had been for a long time. Indeed, from the moment she had nestled up to me in the carriage, I had felt that the hatchet was buried. And I resolved that it should not be I who dug it up!

"Splendid, isn't it?" I said, reining nearer to her.

She nodded, looking at me with shining eyes.

"Aren't you glad you came?" I asked.

"Yes; it's wonderful! Too wonderful for talk!"

I agreed with her and we rode on in silence. And I began to hope again. Perhaps, after all, out here in the desert, with no uniforms around, I might still have a chance . . .

It was by the stars, I suppose, that Mustafa guided himself. At any rate, his pace never faltered. Behind him plodded the camels, strangely at

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home in these surroundings; and then the dark mass of natives, drifting like a cloud across the glimmering sand; and as they went, they crooned a low, grave-yard chant, well-suited to a land which had been dead for centuries! It went on and on; my eyes closed; my head nodded . . .

I caught myself as I was slipping from the saddle and the shock of it startled me wide awake. I looked around a little sheepishly to see if Mollie had noticed — and found myself gazing into the dark eyes of Mlle. Roland.

"You were nearly asleep!" she taunted, in a low voice. "I saw you nodding!"

"I caught myself just in time," I admitted, wondering what had become of Mollie. "Aren't you sleepy?"

"Oh, no, no!" she breathed. "I feel as though I should never sleep again!"

"I feel as though I should never be fully awake again," I said. "This is getting into my blood. The rest of my life will be passed in a kind of trance."

She smiled again at that, and her face seemed very wonderful. I noted how the starlight was caught in her hair and reflected in her eyes.

"There would be many fates worse than that!" she murmured.

Yes, I reflected, there were many worse fates

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than that — to live, as it were, drugged by this perfumed atmosphere, without thought for the past or care for the future . . .

Perplexed no more with human or divine,
To-morrow's tangle to the winds resign ——

"Oh, look, look!" cried my companion, and following her pointed finger, I saw that the horizon ahead of us was flushed with rose. "It is the moon!" she breathed.

The flush deepened, grew, shot up into the sky, and then, over the horizon's brim, peeped a glowing disc . . .

It was not the cold, white moon I knew; but a more brilliant orb, burning with its own light, throwing a rosy flush over the gray sand, transforming the world into a wonderland . . .

We rode on in silence, with rapt faces and trembling hearts . . .

Out of the darkness ahead came a sharp word of command, startlingly loud in the silence.

"It is here we stop," said Davis's voice, and I realized that the word of command had come from Mustafa.

In a moment the natives had thrown off their packs; the camels were kneeling down and being

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relieved of their burdens, protesting with weird screams. As I slipped from the saddle, and helped Mlle. Roland to dismount, Mustafa appeared out of the darkness and spoke to Davis.

"We will put up the tent for the ladies," said the latter, after a moment, "but we men will sleep in our blankets. The halt is only for a few hours — we will be off again at dawn. Perhaps some fruit would be welcome."

Mustafa hurried away again, and presently a native appeared, with a basket of oranges and dark-brown dates . . .

As I looked around, I could see dimly that we had halted beside a huge mound of sand.

"Is this an oasis?" I asked Davis.

He laughed at the question.

"That mound is a tomb buried in the sand," he said. "There is no evidence that there was ever any vegetation here. The tomb was opened some years ago," he added, "but it had been rifled by the Arabs."

"What on earth did anyone want to build a tomb away out here for?" asked Ma Creel.

"I do not know, madam," answered Davis. "Nobody knows. The ruins to which we are going are much farther in the desert, and yet I believe there is a tomb among them — perhaps more than

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one. There are many things about ancient Egypt we do not understand — but perhaps, some day — At least, I hope to solve the riddle of those tombs."

There was an intensity in his manner which impressed us, and a little silence followed. Then, suddenly, Mlle. Roland laughed — a low laugh full of mockery.

"It is but one riddle of a thousand, is it not?" she asked.

Davis had started round toward her nervously at the sound of that laugh; now he stood blinking at her uncertainly.

"One of many thousand," he said quietly at last; "but still worth solving. There is your tent, ladies," he added, in another tone, and I saw that a white shape had arisen against the mound.

"Is — is it all right?" asked Mollie, a little tremulously.

"Perfectly all right," Davis assured her. "There is not the slightest danger. The natives are camped on the other side of the mound, and we shall be sleeping just outside."

"If we only had a light," began Ma Creel.

"There *is* a light, madam," Davis broke in; and indeed the tent was suddenly illuminated faintly from within. "You will find it very comfortable."

Nevertheless, by a sort of common impulse, we accompanied them to the door of the tent. Ma

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Creel was the first to enter, and she gave a cry of delighted astonishment.

"But look!" she cried. "It is perfect! Come in! Come in!"

We crowded in at the door and saw that it was, indeed, surprisingly well-arranged. Curtains of canvas divided it into three apartments, in each of which was a cot, spread with spotless blankets. Beside each cot lay a narrow rug, and on this stood a folding-chair. The entrance formed a sort of vestibule, in which stood a folding-table, with basin and pitcher of water, and soap and towels. There was even a mirror. The light came from an oil-lamp, hung against the centre-pole.

"Oh, I feel all right, now!" said Ma Creel. "This is like home! Good-night, everybody!"

We bade them good-night, and Mustafa led us to the spot where our own blankets had been spread upon the sand.

"Iss anything else required, saars?" he asked, looking around at us.

"No, I think not," Davis answered.

"Then good-night, saars," said Mustafa, and disappeared around the mound.

We could hear the amused voices of the women as they prepared themselves for bed, and I reflected that the hatchet between Mollie and Mlle. Roland must be buried, too! Such silly antagonism

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could not survive amid such surroundings — the desert was too downright, too real, too august. And I was glad.

Davis, sitting on his blanket, was removing coat and shoes, and we followed his example. As I lay back, I felt that the sand was pleasantly warm; it adjusted itself to the body almost like a feather-bed. I pulled the other blanket over me, and stared up at the stars. This was an adventure worth having! Whether the film was a success or failure, I was getting something out of this expedition which I would never forget.

So were we all — Creel and Mollie and even old Digby — Mlle. Roland perhaps most of all — I remembered how her eyes had shown — as brightly as the stars — and there never were such stars — or such a moon . . .

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CHAPTER XI

MUSTAFA awakened us an hour before dawn. He had coffee ready, and while we drank it, the natives struck the tent and loaded the camels and shouldered their packs, and presently we were streaming away eastward again. The horizon ahead of us was a dull gray; but gradually it brightened to pearl, then flushed to a faint rose, then to yellow and gold. The desert changed color, too — from gray to a yellowish-brown, marked with livid marblings where the sand folded into waves — and always on every side it seemed ready to rush down upon us and overwhelm us.

Mustafa finally gave the signal to stop for breakfast, and our native cook served us a surprisingly appetizing meal; and then we pressed on again. For an hour or two, the heat was scarcely noticeable; then, as the sun climbed higher, it grew more and more oppressive, till at last Creel protested.

"I don't think we ought to be riding under this sun," he said to Davis. "Some of us will have a heat-stroke."

"If we stop now we will lose a day," Davis protested.

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"We'd better lose a day than lose our lives," said Creel. "I think we ought to stop."

"Very well," Davis assented, but he did not look pleased. I could see that, if left to himself, he would have cracked the whip over the whole outfit and hurried us on. Those ruins were calling him!

He signalled to Mustafa; the caravan halted; the natives dropped their packs with alacrity; some shelters were run up, and under them we drowsed till late afternoon. Then we were off again, stopping only for dinner at sunset, and it was very late before we camped for the night.

We had all of us grown a little moody during the day — or perhaps reflective would be a better word. At any rate, there had been little attempt at talk; we had ridden along in silence, singly; and now, when we dismounted, instead of lingering around the basket of fruit which one of the servants set before us, we scattered as soon as we decently could. My own impulse was to get away for a quiet smoke before turning in; and I had just settled myself comfortably in the sand when I was surprised, and not too well pleased, to see some one coming toward me. I lay still, hoping he would go past, but he evidently caught sight of me, for he altered his course a little, and came straight on. Then I saw that it was Jimmy.

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"Hello!" he said. "I saw you coming out this way. You don't mind if I sit down?"

"Of course not," I protested.

"I thought I'd like a little talk," he said, and sat down and filled his pipe, and for a moment smoked in silence, staring out across the sand.

"Tired?" I asked at last, by way of starting things.

"No — not so very. But it's hard on the women."

"Mlle. Roland seems to stand it all right," I remarked.

"Yes — I wasn't thinking of her. Thank heaven there's only one more day of it!"

"I rather like it," I said. "It's new and interesting. Listen to that, now!"

From the camp of the fellahin, a short distance away, came a low chanting, as though they were trying to sing themselves to sleep.

"I know," he assented; "but all the same, the more I think about it, the more foolish it seems to travel away out here into the middle of the desert in order to get a location. There must be dozens of places along the river which would have done just as well."

"Creel doesn't think so," I said. "He went all through the river locations."

"My own opinion is," said Jimmy, "that the man

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at the Metropolitan or Davis or somebody put one over on Creel in order to get some excavating done. Of course it will be a good location, but I'll bet it's not the only one by a long shot!"

"Well, I don't think we have anything to complain of," I said. "Davis seems to have made every possible provision for our comfort."

"Oh, he's done that," Jimmy agreed. "He knows his business."

"And the desert is wonderful."

Jimmy stirred uneasily.

"It's all of that," he agreed. "In fact, it's a little too wonderful!"

"What do you mean?" I asked, looking at him; and I saw that at last we had got to the subject he wanted to talk to me about. But for a moment longer he fought shy of it.

"There's something in the air — in the silence — in all this vast emptiness that gives me the jumps. I can't sleep. Every time I lie down, I have a sensation as though the sand was going to pour down on me and bury me. I seem to be suffocating."

"Oh, you'll get used to it," I said hopefully.

"I hope so. The sensation isn't pleasant. And I hope I won't see any more ghosts," he added.

"Ghosts!" I echoed, staring at him.

"Look here, Billy," he said, edging closer and lowering his voice, "I haven't breathed a word of

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this to anybody, and for a while I thought I wouldn't, but it's been worrying me, and at last I decided to tell you. Don't think me a fool."

"Go ahead," I said, as he stopped. "Let's hear about it."

"Last night," he went on slowly, "as I lay on my back, staring up at the sky, something came and stood beside me."

The chill in the air seemed suddenly to deepen. I shivered a little and snuggled closer into the sand.

"What was it?" I asked.

"I don't know what it was. I hadn't heard any sound, and I didn't know anything was there till its face came in between me and the stars."

"An Egyptian face?"

"I couldn't see; it seemed to be covered with a dark cloth or something."

"Sure you weren't dreaming?" I suggested.

"Yes. I wasn't sleepy. I was lying there with my eyes wide open. And suddenly that face peered down at me . . ."

He stopped, puffing moodily at his pipe.

"Go on," I said, at last. "What happened?"

"Nothing happened. It hung there for an instant looking down at me, and I could see its eyes glittering; and then it disappeared. I sat up and looked around, but it wasn't anywhere in sight. I couldn't understand that, either, for the moon made

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it as bright as day. There was the women's tent standing out white and clear on one side, and the empty desert on the other . . ."

He stopped as he saw the expression on my face.

"Could it have gone into the tent?" I asked.

"I thought of that, and sat there and listened. But the women slept right on. . . ."

I sat up and knocked out my pipe against the heel of my shoe.

"We must tell Davis at once," I said. "This is pretty serious."

"There's no use to alarm the women . . ."

"We'll not alarm them — they don't need to know. But we can't have any of the natives prowling around their tent."

"Yes," agreed Jimmy; "that's the only sensible explanation — but somehow it doesn't satisfy me. It didn't look like a native."

"You didn't see anything but the head," I pointed out, "and that was wrapped up just as a native's would have been."

"I know — but there was a perfume . . ."

He stopped abruptly and stared out across the sand.

"Go on," I said impatiently. "What sort of perfume?"

"You'll laugh at me, Billy," he said, "but I'll

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swear it was the odor of grave-clothes, of opened tombs . . ."

He stopped again, and I could see his lips trembling.

"Oh, come!" I protested. "What do you know about the odor of grave-clothes? You're letting your imagination run away with you. The natives have an odor . . ."

"Yes; I've noticed it. But it wasn't in the least like that!"

"Now, look here, Jimmy," I said, "you don't mean to tell me that you seriously believe this thing was a ghost?"

"No," he answered slowly, "I don't believe in ghosts — at least I didn't until last night. But anything seems possible here!"

"The dead are just as dead in Egypt as they are anywhere," I pointed out. "Your ghost was a native prowling around to see if he could steal something — or do some other mischief. Just get that firmly in your head, will you?"

"But where did he go?" Jimmy persisted, his voice a little shrill. "How could he disappear like that? If I'd seen him slinking away — but I didn't! There was nothing in sight — absolutely nothing — I stood up to make sure — I even walked around a little . . ."

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"These natives are up to all sorts of tricks," I said. "He may have dropped behind a sand ridge — or he may have ducked under the tent. Come on — we'll tell Davis."

We found Davis, after some searching, sitting hunched up by himself, with his arms around his knees, staring away to the east, as though by concentration he hoped to see what was happening to his beloved ruins; and we sat down beside him, and I told him the story. He listened with close attention.

"It was undoubtedly one of the natives," he agreed, "though I have never known anything of the sort to happen before."

"You don't mean to say no Egyptian will steal?" I asked.

"Oh, no; they're no more honest than other people. But what good would it do to steal anything out here? If the thief tried to leave the caravan, he'd die in the desert; and if he didn't leave it, he'd be discovered as soon as anything was missed, for all the natives would be searched. They all know that."

"Then what was his object?"

"I don't know," and Davis pulled his white beard thoughtfully. "In fact, I'd say it wasn't a native at all, if there was any other possible explanation."

"Jimmy is inclined to think it was a ghost," I said

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jokingly. "He says it smelled of grave-clothes. Of course, he is a connoisseur of grave-clothes."

But Davis didn't appear amused. Instead, he looked at Jimmy quickly.

"What sort of odor was it?" he asked.

"I can't just describe it," said Jimmy, slowly; "a sort of musty, spicy smell — a smell I somehow associate with mummies — though I don't know that I ever smelled a mummy. They're always in tight glass cases — all I ever saw . . ."

His voice trailed away, and he left the sentence unfinished. Instead of laughing at him, as I expected, Davis sat silent, plucking at his beard, and staring at the horizon. And poor Jimmy, crouching there, filtering the sand nervously between his fingers, and hungering for a word of comfort — and not getting it! At last I could stand it no longer.

"You don't mean to say *you* think it was a ghost!" I protested impatiently.

"Oh, no," Davis answered quietly; but there was something in his voice — a sort of undercurrent — I had never noticed there before. "It was one of the natives without a doubt. But his object puzzles me."

"There are the women," I suggested.

But Davis shook his head decidedly.

"It had nothing to do with them," he said. "I know these Egyptians. But I'll see Mustafa."

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As he started to rise, Jimmy caught his arm.

"We mustn't alarm the women," he said.

"I'll tell no one but Mustafa," Davis promised. "The whole thing had better be kept among us three."

He disappeared in the darkness in the direction of the camp. After a moment Jimmy rose wearily and brushed the sand from his trousers.

"I'm going to turn in," he said. "I'm dead tired. Are you coming?"

"No," I said; "I think I'll smoke another pipe."

"Good-night, then."

"Good-night," I answered, and watched him as he walked away.

Davis came back presently, and somewhat to my surprise, sat down beside me.

"I've spoken to Mustafa," he said; "he'll keep his eyes open. I don't think we'll be bothered again — unless it's a case of nerves."

"Jimmy was telling me that the silence and emptiness and all that was giving him the jumps," I said.

"I suspected it from the way he talked," nodded Davis. "I've seen just such cases before. Some men can't stand the desert at all — they develop mania and get worse and worse as long as they stay in Egypt. With others it wears off in a few days. If he's bothered again, I'll give him a sedative."

"What was the use of coming away out here in

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the desert, anyway?" I asked. "Why couldn't we have stayed somewhere near the river?"

Davis straightened out his legs and cleared his throat, as though suddenly called upon to defend himself.

"The place we're going to," he said, "is, as I understand it, the exact background Mr. Creel wants for his picture. He'll not be disappointed — I can promise you that — and it has this further advantage, that he can rearrange things to suit himself — something he would never be permitted to do with any of the better-known places along the river. I'm going to help with the picture all I can. But I don't need to pretend to you — I don't pretend to anybody — that it's the picture which interests me most."

"What does interest you most?"

"The solution of the greatest riddle in Egyptian history," he answered, his voice suddenly hoarse with emotion. "Between the twelfth and the eighteenth dynasties there is a gap of five centuries on which we have scarcely a single ray of light. It was during those five centuries that Egypt was ruled by the so-called Hyksos, or shepherd-kings — Arabs, probably. The period extends roughly from twenty-two hundred to seventeen hundred years before Christ. And it was during that period, according to the Bible narrative, that the Children of

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Israel were in bondage here; that Joseph was overlord at the court of Pharaoh; that the seven years' famine occurred — and all the rest of it. If we can unearth the records of that period, we will prove or disprove the Bible story."

"And you expect to unearth them out here in the desert?" I asked incredulously.

"I think it possible," he answered gravely.

A quiver of excited awe swept through me. Here indeed was something big — something tremendous — something beside which our own business in the desert dwindled to ridiculous insignificance.

"But," I stammered; "but I don't see . . ."

"The records of those five hundred years," Davis explained, "even the names of the shepherd-kings, were destroyed by the native kings who came after them, who were determined that not a single memento should remain of that period of alien rule. The great Sphinx in the Louvre, the Bagdad lion, the sacrificial stone at Gizeh — all these were covered by the records of that period; and they were all chiselled away so carefully that scarcely a word is decipherable. Not a single inscription was left anywhere; and if any still exist, it must be in some remote place where they remained undiscovered . . ."

"But why out here?" I asked. "What makes you think . . ."

"I believe one of those kings was buried here,"

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Davis answered. "If I can find his tomb — if it is still intact . . ."

He was combing his beard nervously again, and I suddenly discovered that the hand which held my pipe was trembling violently. Then Davis rose with a jerk.

"We must get some sleep," he said. "And I would ask you not to repeat anything of all this. It is a secret I don't share with everyone."

There was a note in his voice which told me that he was already wondering how he had come to share it with me!

I promised, of course, to say nothing; and followed him to bed. But my head was whirling as I lay, wrapped in my blanket, staring up at the stars. What a tremendous business — to prove or disprove that splendid Bible story! The thought shook me through and through. It was a long time before I could compose myself for sleep.

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CHAPTER XII

We were up at dawn and jogging eastward again — as it seemed to me we had been doing for days and days. We were all in better spirits — our moodiness had vanished — we were getting acclimated to the desert, I suppose; and for the first time since we started, there were jests and chaffing. It did me good to hear Ma Creel laugh again. It did us all good, for her laugh was infectious . . .

Jimmy had seen nothing more of his ghost, so he said, when I took occasion to inquire, and I concluded that Mustafa's police regulations, whatever they were, had had their effect. Jimmy seemed entirely recovered from his nervousness; he had slept well, he said, and he was quite ready to laugh at his fears of the night before.

"Though night *does* make a difference!" he added.

I joined Davis a little later, and told him of Jimmy's recovery; and then I tried to take up again our talk of the night before; but he refused to be drawn out. And then Mlle. Roland joined us, in the gayest of spirits, and rode along between us, asking Davis all sorts of questions about the desert and the oasis we were bound for.

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It wasn't a real oasis, it seemed; a real oasis is fed underground, in some mysterious way, from the waters of the Nile. This one was at the bottom of a broad basin into which was drained all the rain which fell for miles and miles around. Underneath it, so Davis hazarded, there was a natural reservoir, holding enough water to carry it over the dry seasons; for there was a well in the centre of the oasis which always had water in it. The whole place was only a few acres in extent, though there were evidences that it had once been much larger — maintained, perhaps, by artificial irrigation; but it was steadily shrinking before the ceaseless onslaughts of the desert, and would probably, some day, be wiped out altogether. The ruins which he had been excavating had once stood in the midst of vegetation, but now there was some three hundred yards of sand between them and the edge of the oasis. It was a graphic instance of the struggle which had been going on in Egypt ever since time began, and which had kept it a mere ribbon of a land in the midst of a trackless waste.

I hoped from the way Davis had loosened up under the charm of our companion that he would go ahead and tell us something of what he hoped to find in the ruins; but perhaps my wish was too evident in my face, for he suddenly shut up like a clam, excused himself and urged his donkey forward to join

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Mustafa at the head of the column. He was so evidently anxious to get rid of us, that the girl and I couldn't help laughing as we met each other's eyes.

I had never seen her looking so beautiful. She had disdained a veil from the first, and sun and air had given the faintest tinge of bronze to her skin; her full lips had taken on a deeper crimson; her whole face fairly glowed with some deep, mysterious well-being. She was vivid, radiant — and I told her so.

"It is just happiness," she explained. "For some reason, I am very, very happy. It is as though some great desire was about to be realized."

"What desire?" I asked.

"I do not know — I only know that within me there is a strange peace."

"At least you know what your great desire is!" I protested.

"I have never had a great desire — unless it was to be an actress — a really good one."

"Well," I began; but she shook her head.

"Oh, no; it is not that! I am certain it has nothing to do with that! Most probably, it is nothing at all — nothing but the wonder of all this."

She looked out eastward across the sand to where, faint against the horizon, the serrated peaks of a range of rugged hills could just be discerned.

"Professor Davis says that the Red Sea lies be-

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yond those hills," she added. "But you will notice that we are turning more to the south."

"Has Davis been talking to you?" I asked in some surprise.

"Oh, I did most of the talking; but when he gets started, he is most interesting."

"Has he told you . . ."

I stopped, remembering my promise.

"That he hopes to make a great find? Yes. It seems there is a king's tomb somewhere among those ruins."

"He's only guessing," I said; "but if he guesses right, it will be a tremendous thing for him."

"If he finds the tomb," she added, "perhaps we shall see the ghost of that old king! Their ghosts are supposed to live in their tombs, you know."

I laughed as I glanced at her, for I supposed that she was jesting; but I was astonished to see that her face was very serious.

"You're not in earnest!" I protested.

"Certainly I am in earnest!"

"Do you really believe in ghosts?"

"I have always believed in ghosts."

"Have you ever seen one?"

"No — not yet!"

"Then you ought to talk to Jimmy Allen," I began, and stopped suddenly, remembering that the women were not to be alarmed. I have to confess

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that Mlle. Roland did not seem in the least alarmed.

"Has *he* seen a ghost?" she inquired tranquilly.

"He thought he saw one night before last . . ."

I stopped again, for the expression of her face had suddenly changed. The glow had left it — it was almost sallow — and there was something like fear in the eyes that looked at me.

"Go on!" she commanded. "Tell me!"

"I shouldn't have said anything about it! It wasn't a ghost, of course. One of the natives was wandering about the place, and Jimmy saw him — that was all."

She breathed a quick sigh of relief.

"I thought you were going to tell me something exciting," she said. "But most ghost stories turn out like that!"

"All of them," I said positively, and we dropped the subject.

Then Jimmy Allen rode up, and I had another shock.

I have already told of the impression she gave me of holding Jimmy at a distance; and I had had the feeling that he was beating vainly against a wall of ice. But the wall had vanished. The eyes she turned upon him were much more than friendly. She had never greeted me with such a smile. What had been going on, I wondered? Had they reached an understanding . . .

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And then I saw that it was as much a surprise to Jimmy as to me; for he turned pale and then red, and clutched his saddle as though he feared to fall.

And suddenly I felt like an intruder, and reined my donkey in and fell back with the others.

But at least I could look at them — at the way their donkeys drew together, at the turn of their heads, the inclination of their bodies.

"Jimmy seems to be getting on!" said a low voice at my elbow, and I turned to find that Mollie had ridden up beside me.

"Yes," I agreed; "and I don't understand it."

"What don't you understand?" she demanded sharply.

"She has always seemed to dislike him — and here, quite suddenly . . ."

"She makes eyes at him," said Mollie. "There is nothing surprising in that. Jimmy is a very handsome fellow."

"Too handsome to live with," I amended. "I prefer the rugged type of countenance."

"Like your own!" she mocked.

"Well, yes," I said. "Why shouldn't I admit it?"

"Most people would call it just ugly," she remarked, looking at it impersonally.

I hadn't deserved that, but I managed to bear up.

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It was far better to be knocked about than to be ignored. I drew a little nearer.

"At least it has a chin," I said; "which is more than can be said of some."

"What do you mean by that?" she demanded.

"I was thinking of certain long-nosed, close-eyed, narrow-headed idiots in uniform," I explained. "And I was thinking of the miles and miles I've seen you walk beside them; and the hours and hours you've leaned over the rail with them. How could you do it, Mollie?"

"You were pretty fully occupied yourself," snapped Mollie, with a show of temper which surprised me. "I didn't know you had time to look at me!"

Which reminded me to look again at Mlle. Roland; and I saw with astonishment that she and Jimmy were riding quite a distance apart and both were sitting very stiff; and just then Mlle. Roland reined in her donkey, turned him sharply, and passed us with a frigid little smile; while Jimmy rode on alone, his shoulders drooping dejectedly.

Mollie leaned over to me, her eyes snapping.

"She's a cat!" she hissed. "And you defend her! You have the nerve to defend her!"

And without waiting for me to answer — though, indeed, I was quite incapable of answering! — she wheeled her donkey and joined Ma Creel,

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who had entrusted the guidance of her donkey to a boy, and was jogging placidly along under a white umbrella, the only real philosopher in the lot of us!

I rode on, divided between disgust and bewilderment. I hadn't defended Mlle. Roland — I had never suspected that she needed defending! Even yet I couldn't see that she did; but in any event, she was thoroughly competent to take care of herself. The only thing I was sure of was that Mollie had dug up the hatchet again.

I found myself looking at Jimmy's dejected figure with a sort of fellow-feeling, and I joined him presently, thinking that perhaps we might console each other; but there was no hint of welcome in the look he turned upon me, and he didn't even take the trouble to listen to my remarks. But that evening, he was a little more communicative — to the extent, at least, of repeating certain well-worn aphorisms. We had somehow gravitated together for a smoke after dinner.

"Davis says we'll get there to-night," I said.

"Get where?" he asked, waking out of a sort of dream.

"Where we're going, of course!" I snapped, my own nerves being considerably frazzled.

"I beg your pardon, Billy," he said. "I wasn't listening. It's an oasis, isn't it?"

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"You don't need to make conversation for my sake," I said.

"But I really want to know," he persisted. "*Isn't* it an oasis?"

"Davis says it isn't a true oasis," and I repeated what he had told us. "It does rain sometimes out here, so Davis says," I added; "sort of laps over from the Red Sea."

"One would never think it," said Jimmy, looking absently out over the sand. And then he startled me by adding, "Women are hell!"

"Well," I said cautiously, "my experience hasn't been great — but so far as it goes, they are."

"First they blow hot — then they blow cold."

"My experience has been principally on the cold side," I said. "Yours, so far as I have observed it, has been the other way."

"They make me sick!" he said. "I thought I knew them!"

"And now when you find you don't, you're sicker still!" I said.

"What do you mean by that?" he demanded, and glared at me.

"Oh, what's the use of trying to bluff me?" I asked. "I can see what ails you — anybody could!"

"My God!" he groaned. "Is it as plain as that?"

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"Oh, come!" I said. "We're not making a film! Besides, it's nothing to be ashamed of. Everybody knows I'm in love with Mollie Adams and that she won't look at me . . ."

And then, to my amazement, Jimmy suddenly forgot his troubles and turned over on his back and laughed and laughed.

"I'm glad it amuses you!" I snorted; and that seemed to set him off again; and just then Mustafa gave the signal to start.

I tried to find out, later on, what it really was that had set him off like that; but he just rode along without looking at me. For blowing hot, then cold, a woman is nowhere with an Irishman!

I found out, eventually, that nobody wanted to talk to me. I endeavored to have an explanation with Mollie, but she treated me like a leper; Creel, his brows furrowed in thought, waved me impatiently away; Davis was so excited by the prospect of beginning work on the morrow that he didn't even pretend to listen; Digby and Ma Creel, riding side by side, were reminiscencing again; and finally I was astounded to see Mollie rein in beside Mlle. Roland, and engage in an apparently intimate and engrossing conversation.

So I fell gradually to the rear, and let my donkey jog along any why he pleased, and reflected upon the inconsistencies of human nature. Now *I* was

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not subject to such ups and downs. You would find me to-morrow just where I was to-day. I didn't like people one day and hate them the next; I didn't call people cats and then take them to my bosom the next moment! I didn't . . .

Suddenly an excited clatter broke out among the natives, and I looked up to see a bunch of ghostly palms faintly outlined against the sky. We had reached the oasis.

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CHAPTER XIII

It was not until next morning that I was able to get any but the vaguest idea of the spot of earth which was to be the theatre of our drama. Then it didn't take me long to discover that the photographs hadn't begun to do it justice. It was, as Davis had said, only a few acres in extent, roughly circular in shape, with picturesque clumps of date-palms and thorny acacias scattered about it, and a thick growth of coarse grass striving to hold back the desert sand. One had only to look at it — a pigmy pitted against a giant — to realize how hopeless the struggle was!

In the middle of the oasis, at its lowest point, was the well — a tiny circular pool of clear water — over which Mustafa set a guard at once to make sure that the water was not by any chance wasted or defiled. I tasted it and was surprised to find that it was quite cool.

Three hundred yards away to the east, with the marbled sand stretching all about them, a series of mounds marked the ruins where Davis hoped to make his great discovery. Looking out at them, it seemed hardly possible that they had once stood in the midst of palms and flowers.

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Davis and Mustafa, after considerable talk, agreed on the details of our permanent camp; and then Davis, at the head of a gang of men, hurried away to the ruins, while Mustafa, at the head of another, got the ground ready and put up the tents. When they were all in place, they made quite a little settlement. The two sleeping-tents were placed side by side, some eight or ten feet apart, and in front of them the dining- and lounging-tent was pitched. A little to one side, the cook set up his sheet-iron stove, while farther to the left was the tent for properties and supplies. The native camp was on the other side of the oasis, hidden from sight by a swell of ground. The only tent there was a small one marking Mustafa's headquarters. About it the camels and donkeys and goats were picketed in picturesque confusion.

Ma Creel and old Digby went to work at once unpacking the properties and sorting them out, while Creel hurried away to select his locations. I unpacked my cameras and assured myself that they were all right; then I loaded one of them with a small cartridge, for I wanted to test the light. I had an idea that in this dry atmosphere it would prove much more intense than any I had ever worked with. As I came out of the tent, with the camera on my shoulder, I met Jimmy. He was not looking happy.

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"What's the matter?" I asked. "Blowing cold this morning?"

He grunted disgustedly.

"Where *are* the girls?"

"They are fitting up their new home. They said they didn't need any help, and shooed me away. What are you up to?"

"I'm going to try out a bit of film. I thought I'd go over to the ruins and shoot the professor. Have you been over there? Come along, then."

Five minutes later, we were toiling across the sand toward the low mounds, about which we could see the laborers swarming — for Davis hadn't lost any time putting them to work, when he found that Creel didn't need them — but it was not until we got quite near that we realized the extent of Davis's operations. When I saw the great gashes he had cut in the earth, I began to have a new respect for the man. It was like excavating the Panama Canal! And what a background for our picture!

He saw us coming and hurried out to meet us, his face red and shining with excitement. And I noticed for the first time that he had a pistol in a holster at his belt.

"What's that for?" I asked. "To keep the natives in order?"

"Oh, no," he laughed; "Mustafa attends to

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that. We shot an ape when we were here before — he got to stealing everything he could lay his hands on — and I thought perhaps his mate might still be prowling about. But I've seen no signs of her, so I guess she cleared out."

"And how are the ruins?"

"Everything's in splendid shape," he answered, triumphantly; "better than I ever dared to hope. The sand has drifted very little. There's some clearing up to do, and then I can go ahead from right where I left off."

"Great Scott!" I said, for we had come to the top of a mound from the farther edge of which a mighty chasm stretched below us. "Do you mean to say you dug all that out?"

"Yes — the sand had drifted ten feet above it. I worked here nearly a year."

I could well believe it. The excavation extended from side to side of what seemed a sort of court, through the centre of which ran a row of queerly twisted columns, only a few of which were still upright. The court was surrounded by walls of grayish-white stone, which were only partly uncovered — or perhaps the sand had drifted over them again during the months that Davis had been away. It was at this sand the laborers were working, filling their baskets, hoisting them with a quick swing to the shoulder, and toiling up out of the excavation by

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what seemed a double stair, for the returning laborers, their baskets empty, were descending at the same time. I walked over to it and found that it *was* a double stair, with an inclined plane between the two flights of steps. And then I remembered that I had seen it in one of the photographs.

"Why the inclined plane?" I questioned.

"Tomb entrances were always built that way," Davis explained, "so the great stone coffins could be got up and down."

"But how did you ever know where to begin?" I asked, looking about at the stretch of tumbled mounds.

"Oh, I probed about until I found the staircase. Those are my exploratory ditches out yonder," and he pointed to the great gashes we had seen first. "When I found the stairs, I knew I was at the starting-point. What's the matter with Allen?" he asked suddenly.

I turned quickly to find that Jimmy had sunk down on a mound of sand and was holding his head in his hands as though he feared it might burst. There was something in his attitude — so lax, so abandoned — that sent a thrill of fear through me.

"What's the matter, Jimmy?" I cried, running toward him. "You're not ill?"

He looked up at me with a sort of haggard stare;

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his face was livid, with great drops of sweat standing out across the forehead.

"I don't know what's the matter," he muttered huskily. "My head's whirling . . ."

"It's the sun," said Davis, who had hurried up. "You'll have to be careful till you get used to it. I'll have a couple of my men help you back to the tents. You'd better lie down for a while."

But Jimmy was already better. He straightened up and wiped away the sweat, and a little color came back into his cheeks.

"I'll be all right in a minute," he protested, and rose shakily. "I can't imagine what came over me!"

He was staring down into the excavation as though it fascinated him.

"It's the sun," Davis repeated; "one doesn't realize how hot it is. I've seen a lot of men taken just the same way. You go back and lie down."

"I believe I will," said Jimmy, tearing his eyes away from the excavation by a visible effort and turning toward the oasis.

"You're sure you don't need my help?" I asked.

"Oh, no; I'm all right," and he clambered slowly down the mound.

We followed him with our eyes, and I, at least, was very anxious; but in a moment his shoulders straightened and his pace quickened.

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"He'll be all right with a little rest," said Davis; "but he'll have to be careful not to over-do it, or he'll have a regular stroke. It's evident he can't stand the sun. Were you going to take a picture?" and he nodded toward the camera.

"I was going to try out the light," I said.

"Can I be of any help?"

"Oh, no, thanks. Don't let me bother you."

"If you need me, just whistle," he said, and sprang down the steps three at a time.

I ran through a few feet of film with various apertures, and then descended into the excavation and did the same thing there. Then I sat down and watched the men working, and presently Creel appeared at the top of the mound, and came down the steps and joined me. His face was radiant.

"It's great!" he said. "I wasn't looking for anything half so good. We'll start this afternoon."

"I've been testing out the light," I said. "I don't want to over-expose."

"You'd better develop the film right away. I'll be ready for you by three o'clock."

"You'll have to be careful how you work Jimmy Allen," I said. "He had a little heat-stroke a while ago."

"The deuce he did!" said Creel, and the light went out of his face. "You don't mean to say he's sick!"

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"No; but Davis says he will be if he over-does it."

Creel took off his helmet and ran his fingers through his hair.

"We can't have anything like that happen!" he said. "That would be awful."

"It isn't so bad as that," I assured him. "Jimmy will be all right, I guess. Anyway, he'll work as long as he's able to move."

"Yes," Creel agreed, "Jimmy's no quitter. I'll shield him as much as I can," and he walked over to Davis to arrange the work for the afternoon, while I went back to the supply-tent, and in a dark corner I had rigged up for myself, developed my scraps of film.

As I had expected, the ordinary aperture was far too large for the brilliant desert light; even at the bottom of the excavation, a shade smaller size gave the better film — which was all to the good, because, of course, with the smaller aperture I got a cleaner picture with more brilliant definition. If the film was a failure, I told myself, it wouldn't be the fault of the photography. In fact, the photography ought to go a long way toward saving it, however bad it was. And it wouldn't be the first time the camera-man had proved more important than the director!

Creel had decided to start with some caravan scenes, and Jimmy donned the very becoming khaki

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