

Tales of MAGIC

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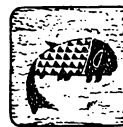
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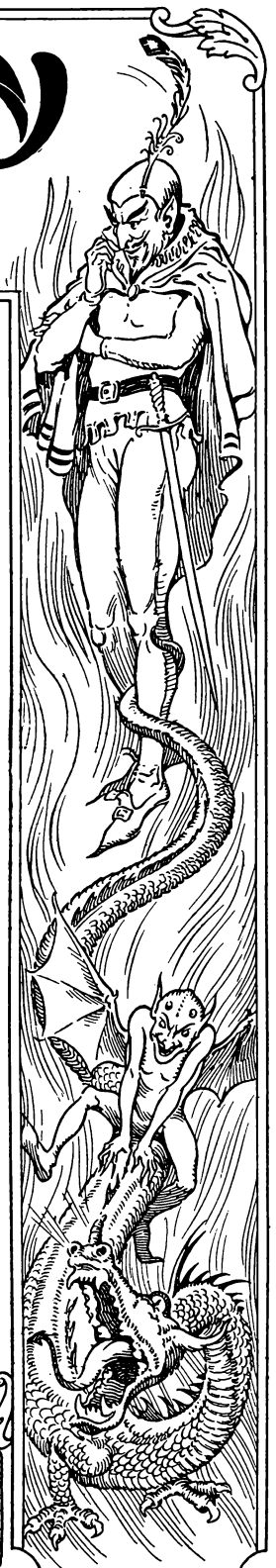
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A department which regularly each month will explain the presentation and secret of a number of good tricks.

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The Adventure of

What Came of An Innocent

By JACK



HAVING several hours of the dull winter afternoon to dawdle away, I wandered into the shop of one of those antique dealers who hang to the flanks of the city like barnacles on a ship's bottom. The dealer was a peculiar fellow—repellently so. His great, naked skull, shining like quicksilver, was surrounded by an aureole of red hair; hair so shockingly crimson in comparison with the scalp that it made me catch my breath in a gasp of surprise. His eyes were two black buttons that seemed to dance with a curious kind of devilry, and his skin was so dry and parchment like that I almost expected to see it crack off in tiny flakes. In the street he would have been grotesque. Here, in his shadowy store, surrounded by a clutter of the ages, he was terrible—a sort of sorcerer stepped from the pages of an old manuscript.

I told him that I was hunting a wedding gift for

His eyes were two black buttons that seemed to dance with a curious kind of devilry

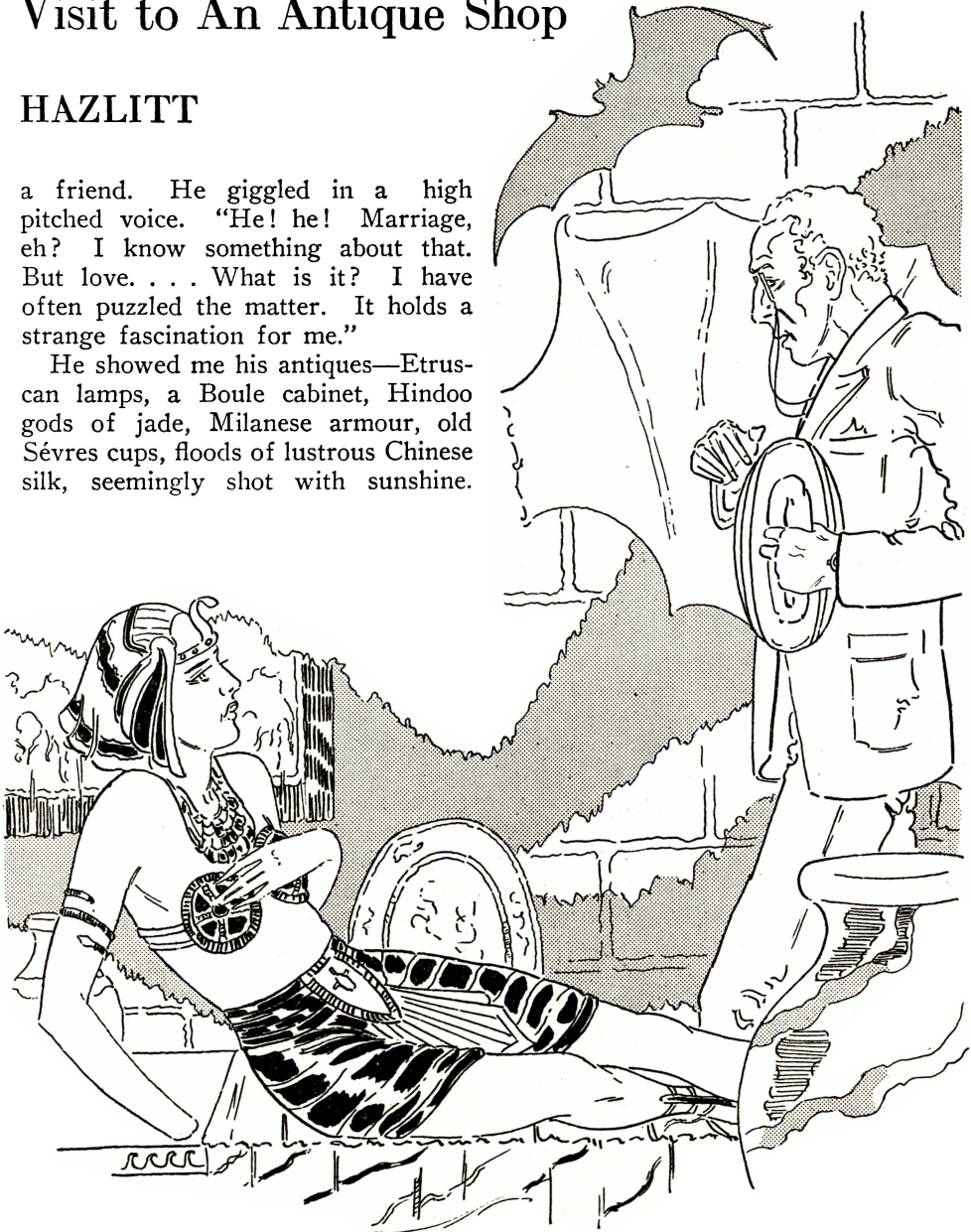
the Mummy's Hand

Visit to An Antique Shop

HAZLITT

a friend. He giggled in a high pitched voice. "He! he! Marriage, eh? I know something about that. But love. . . . What is it? I have often puzzled the matter. It holds a strange fascination for me."

He showed me his antiques—Etruscan lamps, a Boule cabinet, Hindoo gods of jade, Milanese armour, old Sévres cups, floods of lustrous Chinese silk, seemingly shot with sunshine.



Princess Amanti sat up very suddenly, her gaze fixed on me

None of them interested me so much as the face of the shop-keeper himself; an old, intellectual face that might have frowned above a Roman toga, or smiled at the dancing girls of Thebes.



Apparently the dealer sensed my lack of appreciation. With a fine courtesy he invited me into his apartment back of the store. Now, I am not a coward, and, physically, was three or four times as powerful as the shrivelled antiquarian, yet a cold little dash went up my spine as he locked the store door and led me into the dining-room. It was a cozy place, with an open fire and a turkey-red cloth on the table.

An old woman was pottering about, arranging and re-arranging the table in a hopelessly dull way. Her skin was muddy. The veins stood out in her neck, and her thinning, dusty hair was almost white. I noticed, with a peculiar shock, that her right arm ended in a stump directly above the wrist.

My host favored her with a snarl. "Get out of here."

For a moment resentment flickered in her eyes. Then it faded to a cinder. Her shoulders slumped, and she padded upstairs.

"My wife," said the antiquarian.

He brought out a bottle of wine and poured it with the care of a jeweller counting his gems. The wine was golden-green, sparkling, exquisite. It bathed me as in sunshine.

"It is the elixir of Xixouthros, who ruled Egypt before the deluge," he said, rubbing his flat palms.

I stared at him. I didn't believe I had heard him aright, and perhaps I hadn't, but somehow I did not care. I



was vaguely satisfied to lose myself in the atmosphere of mysticism I felt closing in about me.

"You wonder why I gave it to you?"

"Yes. Why?"

His shoe button eyes almost closed in the squint that spread across his countenance. "It was your talk of love. . . ."

He opened a drawer in the table. Instantly I was conscious of Oriental perfumes—bitumen, natron and myrrh, in which the Egyptian dead were bathed. It assailed my nostrils with the effect of a whiff of chloroform. My head grew light, and I seized the edge of the table to keep from falling to the floor. . . .



The antiquarian took something from the drawer and laid it on the table. It was a woman's hand, slim and perfectly formed. The fingers tapered in toward the palm; the nails were rosy and highly polished. Laying there in the center of the turkey-red cloth it seemed a-throb with life. Yet I knew, in spite of my curiously light head, that this must be a mummy's hand—wonderfully embalmed. How eerie it was to think that three thousand years ago it had been part of a living body!

The dealer filled my glass again with the elixir of Xixouthros. I drank eagerly, endeavoring to forget my host's button-like eyes.

"Whose hand was it?" I asked carelessly.

"That of the Princess Amanti, daughter of the Pharaoh called Xixouthros," replied the antiquarian. "I was her lover!"

Had I not drunk the elixir, I might have thought the man mad. He was old, true enough, but the dust of thirty centuries had gathered on her Theban tomb since Princess Amanti was car-

ried there to await the Judgment of Souls.

Preposterous!—Yet I believed.

"I was her lover," repeated the antiquarian in an expressionless voice, "but I was a priest of Thoth, and poorly born. They scoffed at me for my passion. I swore I would have her hand——"

His shrill falsetto rose to an hysterical giggle—"but she died before I could make good my boast. They laid her body away in a tomb on which thousands of slaves had labored for years. I swore by Oms, the dog of hell, that I would have my way, and so one night, my brain seething, I crept to the chamber that sheltered her—and cut off her hand at the wrist! It was the only way I could have it." He giggled again, his bald head twitching.

I stared at him, incapable of movement.

"Then, in a frenzy, I took my life, for it was ashes in my mouth without Amanti. Yet how banal of me to think that I might destroy life—that which is eternal. I have lived again and yet again to realize in subconscious revelations such as these, the folly of my suicide."

"You—have now—a wife," I said thickly.

"Yes. One as ugly as the Cat of Bubastes. Amanti was glorious as the flicker of the moon on the Nile, and yet—yet—I am tormented by Amanti in the sight of my wife's withered stump—in some vague glow in her eyes. I've beaten the woman until my shoulders ached. What right has she to remind me of the women I loved three thousand long years ago? But these cravings for my ancient princess are, I believe, about to be satisfied. You, who have drunk of the elixir of Xixouthros, shall go in spirit to her tomb in Thebes,



and bring her here to me. . . ."

The man was mad—unquestionably mad—yet. . . .

I STOOD in the desert beyond the Nile, and heard the wind in the tents of the caravanmen, the stir of the camels and the forlorn howl of shivering jackal. Before me lay the ruins of a broken civilization—shattered obelisks and pylons; immense tombs of long-forgotten kings. At my feet an uprooted pillar showed steps descending into the shadows. Down there I could see a wall and a lotus-carved rim of a stone-framed pool; beyond it a door. The place was thick with the atmosphere of death and decay. Even the water in the pool lacked the flash and sparkle of life.

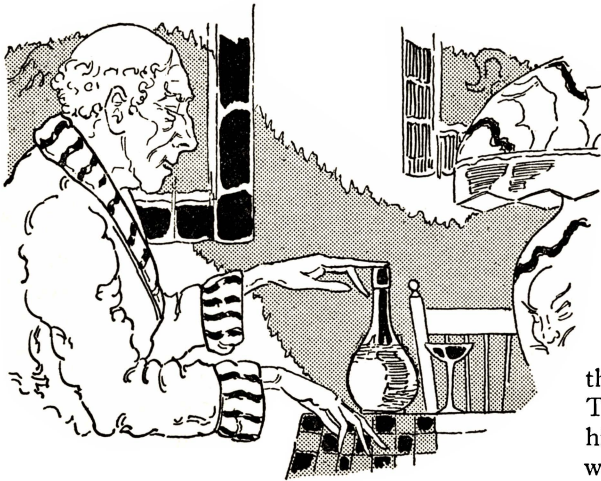


I went down the steps, opened the door, and passed into a vast room, where on every wall and column hung insignia of ancient royalty. Stretched across the threshold—like a sleeping guard—was the figure of a man, wearing a *pschent* of gold and a breastplate that glittered with gems. All about me were mummy-cases, hundreds and hundreds of them. I passed them by, for I saw the gold edges of a woman's sandals sparkle in the gloom. Her arms were crossed on her breast, and—God—one hand had been severed at the wrist.

She seemed merely to have stretched herself out there to sleep, this beautiful Egyptian princess. Her skin was olive—not blackened by naphtha and bitumen as are most mummies'—her brows so dark as to be almost blue. Her features were Grecian in their delicacy of outline, save for the slightly sensual fulness of the lips.

Though the idea seemed utterly ridiculous, I could not help thinking

that I had seen her, or someone who looked like her, at one time or another. Then it came to me of a sudden. The old antiquarian's wife!



The wine was golden-green, sparkling, exquisite. "It is the elixir of Xixouthras, who ruled Egypt before the deluge," he said

Physically, no two people in this world could look less alike than this impassive princess and the shuffling old crone of the curio-shop, and yet there was a strange resemblance that went beyond the flesh.

I gazed on her gold striped skirt, on the scarab-jewelled knife in the girdle supporting it, and thought of the untidy Mother Hubbard the wife of the curio dealer wore. There was not a single item of feature, form or clothing in which they were alike—yet the one made me think of the other.

Standing there beside her I seemed to see the grotesquely bald head of the curio dealer come between us. A sudden fury welled up in me. What right had he to this exquisite toy of the gods? What was his love but a madness that could acquiesce in her mutilation?

I bent above her, touching the soft, cold skin of her arm. The perfume of grave clothes was in my nostrils. It seemed cruel to wake her; she who lay there so peacefully, but my mind was not my own. It belonged to the bald headed little curio dealer.

I spoke to her: "Amanti! Awake!"

The princess stirred, a flush creeping into her colorless cheeks. With a vague motion she brushed back the hair from her forehead, and opened her eyes of Egyptian blue. And, as life came back to her, so it came to all those other dead in the chamber. The guard on the floor got to his feet, yawning; a pharaoh, white bearded and majestic, rose from his stone couch.

And there stood I, in the midst of the majestically garbed returning dead, wearing a pinch-back overcoat and a velour hat!

Princess Amanti sat up very suddenly, her gaze fixed on me; the stump of her slender arm resting on her knee. "What dost thou desire?" she asked.

I told her of the story the curio-dealer had related. I told her that if she desired her hand again she must



An old woman was pottering about

come with me. And then, for the first time, Amanti looked, and saw the raw stump, unhealed after three thousand years!

Her low voice rose to a wail, to a shriek of utter horror; the horror of the tortured dead. My spine became a streak of ice; but, biting my lips to stem back my own grievous fright, I bent and seized her in my arms. . . .

We were instantly back in the antiquarian's little dining-room—all of us who, a moment before, had stood in the great burial hall of the pharaohs. The dining-room had not grown, but it seemed to shelter the multitude with ease. My curio-dealer sat in his chair, stroking his high, bald head, and looking at the hand on the table.

Then, very slowly, his eyes shifted to the woman standing beside me. I expected to see his button-like eyes flame with the joy of possession. Instead, they glowed with a dull hatred.

"What the devil are you doing here?" he cried.

I turned to see how the princess would reply, and my jaw dropped in utter amazement, for there in place of the wonderful girl I had awakened in her Theban tomb, stood the wrinkled old wife of the curio dealer!

"I thought I might wait on you," she mumbled, departing.

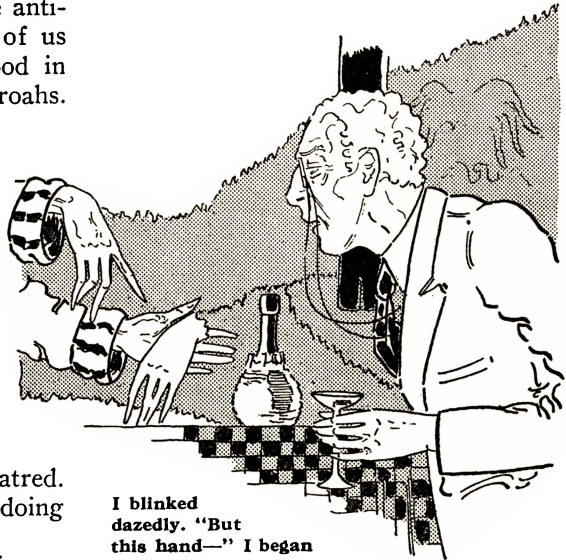
Like a transformation scene in the Hippodrome the ancient throngs had faded away. I found myself seated at the table, as before, my fingers still touching the goblet which had contained the elixir of Xixouthros.

Opposite me, his bald head glistening, sat my host. He was tapping his glass with a lean forefinger and smacking his lips. "Ah! An excellent drink, sir. An *excellent* drink. It

fills one with fancies," he commented.

I blinked dazedly, and then, finding myself, nodded. "But this hand——" I began. Obviously, I had imagined all those other weird things in the space of a mere minute or two. The hand, however, lay there as large as life.

"He—he! You thought it real, eh? No-o. *Papier mache*. She—my wife



I blinked dazedly. "But this hand——" I began

—wears it when she waits on store ——"

I expressed sympathy with her infirmity.

The beady-eyed fellow displayed impatience. "She thinks nothing of it," he declared. "She was born that way. . . . But come. I told you, when you said you were in search of a wedding gift, that I knew something of love. I do. I know this: that love is inexplicable, and that it is useless to inquire into its mysteries. Take my own case. Though I shrink from the very sight of my wife—from her ugly face and shrivelled body—there is yet something that draws me irresistibly to

(Continued on page 64)

THE MUMMY'S HAND

(Continued from page 21)

her, and in my uncertainty I am cruel. I cannot understand my feeling nor describe it, though I experienced it the first time we met. Now, in my later days, I fight it, for it doesn't seem sensible, but it's there—it's there." He tapped his chest in a puzzled sort of way.

The wondering, questioning look in his eyes got under my skin. I arose, trembling slightly.

"I've always hated the very look of her," he was muttering. "Ugly as sin. Mutilated. And yet——"

I left him thus, bowed over his empty glass mumbling about love.