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## Contents for August, 1925

- Cover Design ..... Andrew Brosnatch
- Black Medicine ..... Arthur J. Burks 149  
*Complete Novelette of Haitian Voodoo*
- The Oldest Story in the World ..... Murray Leinster 167  
*Blood-red Rubies—an Oriental Raja—and a Torture Chamber*
- The Bearded Men ..... Adam Hull Shirk 177  
*A Whiskered Hypnotist Ruled Over a Club of Outcasts from Society*
- In the Forest of Villefere ..... Robert E. Howard 185  
*If the Werewolf is Slain as a Man, His Ghost Haunts the Slayer*
- Stallions of the Moon ..... Frank Belknap Long, Jr. 187  
*Verse*
- The Man Who Laughed ..... B. W. Sliney 188  
*Terrible Was the Laughter that Resounded Throughout the Prison*

(Continued on Next Page)

(Continued from Preceding Page)

<b>The Purple Cincture</b> .....	<b>H. Thompson Rich</b>	<b>193</b>
<i>The Bite of Plague-stricken Spiders Accomplished a Frightful Revenge</i>		
<b>The White Queen of the Carolans</b> .....	<b>Arthur Thatcher</b>	<b>200</b>
<i>Two-part Serial of Strange Adventures in Africa—Conclusion</i>		
<b>The Jonah</b> .....	<b>Guy Pain</b>	<b>210</b>
<i>A Cross-eyed Bosun—Maritime Superstition—and a Murder</i>		
<b>The Green Scarab</b> .....	<b>Willis Knapp Jones</b>	<b>213</b>
<i>Peculiar Experience of a Painter and an Egyptian Mummy</i>		
<b>The Lantern-maker</b> .....	<b>Frank Owen</b>	<b>219</b>
<i>Yin Wen's Mind Stopped Like a Clock That Has Run Down</i>		
<b>Servants of Satan</b> .....	<b>Seabury Quinn</b>	<b>223</b>
<b>No. 6. Maria Schweidler.</b> <i>True Tale of Witchcraft in Germany</i>		
<b>The Devil's Opera</b> .....	<b>Arthur S. Garbett</b>	<b>231</b>
<i>Infernal Was the Music Whose Inspiration Was Hate</i>		
<b>Weird Story Reprints: No. 2</b>		
<b>Dr. Heidegger's Experiment</b> .....	<b>Nathaniel Hawthorne</b>	<b>240</b>
<i>The Old Physician Let His Friends Quaff of the Fountain of Youth</i>		
<b>The Graveyard Skunk</b> .....	<b>Harry Harrison Kroll</b>	<b>247</b>
<i>A Mississippi Polecat Tracks Home a Murderer</i>		
<b>The Last Trip</b> .....	<b>Archie Binns</b>	<b>254</b>
<i>The Taxicab Driver Takes a Terrifying Ride to the Cemetery</i>		
<b>La Belle Dame Sans Merci</b> .....	<b>John Keats</b>	<b>258</b>
<i>Verse Reprint</i>		
<b>The Vulture of Pignon</b> .....	<b>W. J. Stamper</b>	<b>259</b>
<i>Tale of Voodoo and the Drunken Fury of a Caco Chief</i>		
<b>Wolfgang Fex, Criminal</b> .....	<b>Howard Elsmere Fuller</b>	<b>266</b>
<i>A Strange Pact Causes a Painter to Become a Murderer</i>		
<b>The Revenge of Philippe Auguste</b> .....	<b>Hasan Volkin and Henri De Crouet</b>	<b>270</b>
<i>A Story of Hatred and Death</i>		
<b>The Eyrie</b> .....		<b>273</b>
<i>A Chat With the Readers</i>		

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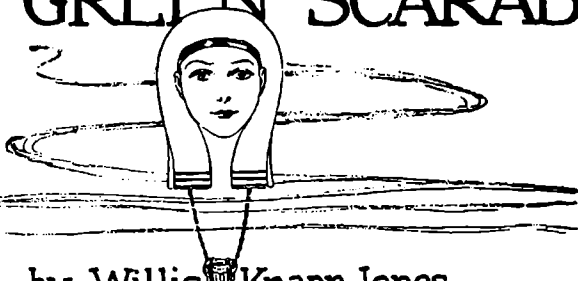
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# THE GREEN SCARAB



A BOSTONER

by Willis Knapp Jones

*Author of "Bright Eyes of Adventure"*

"SO THAT'S the kind of fellow you are, Gil, killing me with curiosity when I let you smear paint all over my room. When are you going to let me see your picture?" Manchester nodded toward the easel that faced the window.

"This morning—no, not yet!" the artist shouted, but he was too late. Manchester had already thrown off the cloth covering the painting.

"Oh, pretty nice! Who is she, Gil?" he exclaimed.

"I don't know." Burgess was slipping off his street coat.

"Don't know?"

"No."

"I mean, who was the model?"

The artist was silent for a minute. "Maybe I can make you understand. After our four years of college together, you ought to know me fairly well. I haven't any model. You see, Dick, for about a year I have been seeing this girl in a hazy sort of way. A while ago—a month ago yesterday, to be exact—she suddenly became so vivid that I felt I must paint her."

"Sort of a dream girl, eh? But what's this? The King Tut craze has struck your lady, apparently. It's clever. The little spot of green ex-

actly balances the mass of shadow above."

"What do you mean?" Burgess was putting on his sketching jacket without paying much attention to the picture.

"Why, this necklace and the pendant."

"She hasn't any necklace." He came across the room, the coat dangling from one arm. As he saw the painting, he stopped in astonishment, then rubbed his eyes. "Well, I'll be darned!" he gasped. "Where did that thing come from?"

"How should I know?" It was Manchester's turn to be surprised.

"But what is it? Looks like one of those bugs you brought back from Egypt last year."

"Certainly. It's a scarab. But I didn't know you were interested in Egyptology."

"I'm not, particularly. The only time I go through your museum is when you are around to explain things."

"Then where did you get the details for the scarab? You're wasting your talents in this line. You ought to be a miniature painter, for I can even read the inscription: 'REDET-

**N-PTAH'**, eldest royal daughter. Where did you get it?"

"I don't know," replied Burgess in a daze. "I never saw the thing before. Last night I was having the devil's own time with the neck of that girl. It was either too flat or it looked as if she had a swelling. Finally I gave up and went home intending to finish it before you saw it. Now look at it. I'm sure I don't know who did it."

"Probably the scrubwoman painted it while she was resting," observed Manchester dryly.

The canvas was filled by a life-size portrait of a young girl, a brunette whose eyes had something magnetic about them. In fact, the whole picture gave the impression that the painted girl was about to step, Galatae-like, into life. To one looking more attentively, the face seemed to be that of a sleeper suddenly and rudely awakened.

But it was not the face which held their attention. They were occupied with a chain which the picture girl wore about her neck, a golden chain from which dangled a green oval pendant.

Burgess stared at the chain as if he doubted his own eyes. He stretched out his finger and touched the dry color. "Well, I'll be darned!" he ejaculated.

"Are you trying to tell me you don't know who painted that scarab?" his friend demanded.

"I never saw it before you told me about it."

"Of course I believe you, implicitly! Any other stories you want to unload? My credulity is unlimited."

"But is it really there?" The artist was struggling into his coat now.

"Are you crazy, Gil?"

"It's been here again, then."

"What's been here?"

"The thing."

"The what?"

"I don't know what it is. Once I was having difficulties with one of the eyes, trying to make it match the other. It wouldn't come out right. In the morning I found that someone had corrected it. I searched the studio then. Only through your room or through the museum can anyone get in here. I know you are not an artist. This isn't the kind of thing a person would do as a joke. It gave me the shivers. Sometimes as I work, I feel a presence behind me. Once, when I was doing this drapery, I know someone had hold of my hand, guiding the brush. I couldn't go on. I ran from the room, and when I came back—look at that fold! Nobody but a great artist could have done it."

"Which of the *Arabian Nights* stories have you been reading lately, Gil?" Manchester gazed with real alarm at his chum.

"I know it sounds like a fairy tale. I wish I could think it was. Do you remember the night I slept here? You wanted me to come in with you. Well, that night I arranged an alarm to go off at the slightest movement of the cloth covering the picture. Then I slept in the corner. About 2 it went off. I lit the light. The cloth was just as I had left it, but the air had a touch of the most curious perfume. Tell me that I'm crazy, that I'm dreaming, or explain it somehow. I'm just about frantic."

"Did you ever consider the idea that you yourself painted those parts that you mention?"

"I? I wasn't here. Don't you think I'd know if I did them?"

"I'm not sure. By the way, do those noises from the unpacking room of the museum next door annoy you while you are working?"

"No, I never hear them after I begin."

"That proves my point." Manchester gestured with his finger. "When you start painting, you for-

get everything. Why, I don't believe you even know you are painting. I came in here yesterday afternoon and you were sitting there scowling and talking to yourself. You didn't answer me when I spoke to you. You artist chaps are so temperamental that you almost go into trances when you are working."

"Of course I saw you. I was worrying about this neck, and you said some silly thing that didn't deserve to be answered. Besides, even if I agreed about the trance, can the sage explain how I could paint an Egyptian scarab, a thing I know nothing about, and do it so accurately that you can read the inscription?"

"That's just the point that sticks me. But your painting is done and ready for the exposition. You need a rest. Why don't you learn something of Egyptology? That stuff that we've had in the storeroom for a couple of weeks is to be unpacked after supper. Dr. Sheridan, the man who directed the excavations, will be in charge. And if you want wild stories, I'll stir up the Egyptian excavators."

"Thanks, I'll be there."

"All right, Gil, and if you can think up any additional details to make your story more convincing, I'll be glad to hear them." And with this Parthian shot, Manchester went out.

For a long time, Burgess stared at the door through which his friend had disappeared. Then he turned to his canvas and picked up his palette. After one glance at it, he rushed to call Manchester back. He had the final proof of the truth of his story, and he was all agog with eagerness to impart the information to his friend. Of all the colors on his palette, there was not the slightest trace of that peculiar blue-green of the scarab.

THAT evening when Gilbert Burgess entered the receiving room of the museum he was faced by pile upon pile of boxes and crates. Three of the foremost Egyptian scholars of their day were unpacking the treasures. Manchester introduced him to them as an artist, and whispered that they were going to unwrap one of the mummies a little later. Burgess made himself as unobtrusive as possible and listened to their talk, most of which he did not in the least understand.

When they had uncrated six mummy cases, Dr. Sheridan turned to the visitor. "We want to show the public just how a mummy is preserved. Would you like to choose the one? It makes no difference to us. Here is one of about the Sixth Dynasty, perhaps 4000 B. C. This one is of the Eighteenth, two thousand years later. Here is a recent one, 1000 B. C. He is a king and might be most interesting."

Burgess pointed to one. "Who is that?" he asked.

"I don't know, exactly; somebody in the royal family, perhaps a queen or her daughter. But it was before the Middle Kingdom, and they had not learned the most perfect embalming."

"Yet, I'd like to see that one, if you don't mind." He could not tell what strange impulse made him go against the suggestions of the authority.

"Just as you like. We'll open the Sleeping Beauty, then," and the men started on the seals of the heavy case. The priest who had prepared her for burial had evidently meant to preserve the body forever. It was some time before the mummy proper could be lifted out.

"Your choice was evidently a beauty," laughed Dr. Sheridan, holding up a small cube of stone. "Here is her vanity case. It was in this mortar that she ground up the green

malachite which she put under her eyes. And look at the scarabs!" he caught up several. "Indeed your choice was good. Usually the outside wrapping is poor, but this is fine stuff." Indeed it was, unusually soft, and creamy yellow from age. The bandages were about eight inches wide.

The other men, who had seen too many mummies unwrapped to be interested, worked on other packages. Only Dr. Sheridan and his assistant and Burgess witnessed the removal of the burial garb of this princess nearly five thousand years dead. They worked in silence, unwinding the linen.

Finally Dr. Sheridan pointed to the head. "One more turn around will uncover the face. That was a superstition the Egyptians had. Sometimes in their elaborate ceremonies, the feet would be wrapped a month before the head. Only when they were ready to put the body into the case would they cover the mouth. Ah! There's her Highness!" Her face was entirely visible.

Where had Burgess seen that face before? It was like none of his acquaintances. Then with startling suddenness it came over him. The girl, except that she had an olive complexion, was identical with his painting!

"Take off some more," he commanded. "I must see the scarab around her neck."

"Oh, there'll be no more scarabs, Mr. Burgess. Nothing now but the opening on the left side, made by the embalmers. This is too early in Egyptian history for the pectoral scarab. That did not come until—What?"

His exclamation came with the appearance, after the removal of more bandage, of just the scarab of which Burgess had spoken.

"This is very unusual," Dr. Sheridan was muttering to himself. But

Burgess had forgotten him. "Dick!" he shouted; "come quick!"

Urged to haste by his tone, Manchester hurried over.

"Well?" Burgess waited.

"It is! It's the image of your painting, Gil!" burst from the astounded man. "But this makes it worse than ever!"

The others clamored to hear the details. When Burgess had finished, they were as puzzled as Manchester had been. "If you had not proved part of your story," observed Dr. Sheridan, "I should be inclined to call you a second Munchausen. Where is the picture?"

"The other side of that wall, in the studio. I'd like to bring it over tomorrow when the light's good, simply to see how nearly alike they are."

Manchester, who had been examining the pectoral scarab, looked up. "You remember, Gil, I translated your scarab this morning. If this is not the identical inscription, I don't know Egyptian. When you bring it over tomorrow you'll see."

**D**R. SHERIDAN was the only one in the museum the next morning when Burgess brought in the canvas. The receiving room did not seem so mysterious now with light creeping into every corner. Burgess looked for the mummy.

"It's moved to the Egyptian room," explained the scientist, interpreting his questioning glance. "Bring your picture there."

The Egyptian Room was fitted like a huge tomb. Draperies and vessels adorned the walls. In the corner stood several mummy cases. One of them Burgess remembered seeing the night before. "All this is new," Dr. Sheridan explained. "They've been here only a couple of weeks."

"Can you tell me how long, exactly?" the artist asked, struck by a sudden idea.

"No, but I can find out. I just got back myself. But there's your princess."

In the center of the room a standard held the body of the partially unwrapped princess, upon her forehead the gold uræus of nobility.

There was something weird about the atmosphere. Burgess sniffed. "What's the odor?" he asked. "It's like the perfume in my studio the night I almost discovered the painter of my picture."

"It is the spice the Egyptians used for embalming. The body remained in it for seventy days. It is natron, mostly. But let's see the picture."

Except for the costume and the difference of complexion, point for point they were identical. There was even a similarity in the arrangement of the hair. It was a puzzle that the Egyptian authority could not solve.

While they were talking, one of the assistants came in to ask about the disposition of some of the material, and Dr. Sheridan excused himself. "I'll be back in a moment," he said.

ONCE alone, Burgess made a more careful comparison of the painting and the princess, even taking measurements. The more he contrasted, the more he was sure that they were the same. "Well, it's got me!" he ejaculated, sitting on a mummy case to await the return of his friend.

The air seemed very heavy. He rubbed his eyes. He felt drowsy. He looked at the canvas leaning against the side of the tomb, and then at the dead princess.

Suddenly he started up. Was she breathing? There was surely a slight movement of her breast.

Finally, like a sleeper awaking, she stirred. An instant later she opened her eyes. Her face had the suddenly-awakened look of the girl in the painting. Her listless gaze wandered

around the room, settling with a start upon the portrait. She sat up and stared at the canvas. Then she shook her head as if angry. The presence of the artist seemed to puzzle her for a moment, but she waved her hand with an imperious gesture. Her meaning was very evident, though Burgess could not understand why the one who was responsible for it should want the picture destroyed. He laid it to a woman's whim, and shook his head, smiling as he refused.

The princess suddenly arose and, taking no notice of him, glided to one of the mummy cases. The linen windings had somehow disappeared, and she was dressed in a long flame-colored robe. Remembering the difficulty the men had had in opening a case, Burgess was astonished at the ease with which she turned back the cover. A few blocks of color fell to the floor as a young man stepped out, carrying in his hand several artists' brushes.

Burgess gave a gasp of surprise. If the princess resembled the portrait, the young man was a perfect duplicate of himself, several shades darker.

The young Egyptian seemed momentarily astonished at seeing Burgess, but before he could do anything, the princess touched her companion's arm, and they talked earnestly together. Several times they looked at the canvas. Finally the Egyptian nodded assent, holding out his brushes. He then took a step toward the portrait. Burgess, however, had other ideas about the destruction of his exposition picture, and rushed to intercept him.

The lady stretched her hand toward him. To Burgess, it seemed as if a claw of ice had clutched his heart. He stood still. His breath came in gasps. The room was making dizzying circles. His head pained. Then all grew blank before him.

Suddenly the princess struck him and shouted in his ear, "Wake up!

You must have been asleep for half an hour." Or was it Manchester?

Burgess opened his eyes. The first thing he saw was the princess lying on the standard as she had been placed. "I know who painted that picture!" the artist shouted. "Look in that case."

"That reminds me," Manchester remarked as they were breaking the seals. "Sheridan asked me to tell you that these mummies came a month ago, day before yesterday. He's sorry he couldn't come back, but some of the men are in trouble about a vase that came broken, and he has to help them."

"But a month ago," mused Burgess; "the very day I began my picture. Do you see any connection?"

THEY opened the stone lid. "Why, he was an artist, Gil," Manchester exclaimed as several color pots rolled out. "And of the same period as the princess. You and he, if you really believe he helped you, did a good job. I'm interested in seeing how the portrait compares with the original."

He looked around. The canvas was lying face down on the floor. Manchester lifted the picture. His face grew white and he dropped it again.

Burgess sprang to catch the painting. Then he, too, uttered a cry as he set up the huge frame. It was absolutely blank, except that in the canvas, a third of the way from the top, was a small, accurate reproduction of a little green scarab.