

Weird Tales

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Published monthly by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, 2457 E. Washington Street, Indianapolis, Ind. Entered as second-class matter March 20, 1923, at the post office at Indianapolis, Ind., under the act of March 3, 1879. Single copies, 25 cents. Subscription, \$2.50 a year in the United States, \$3.00 a year in Canada. English office: Charles Lavell, 13, Serjeant's Inn, Fleet Street, E. C. 4, London. The publishers are not responsible for the loss of unsolicited manuscripts, although every care will be taken of such material while in their possession. The contents of this magazine are fully protected by copyright and must not be reproduced either wholly or in part without permission from the publishers.

NOTE—All manuscripts and communications should be addressed to the publishers' Chicago office at 810 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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The PEARL of a QUEEN

By · · A · A · IRVINE



"See how a drop of vinegar can dissolve a fortune."

ON A sunny morning toward the end of June a man sat writing at a great mahogany desk in the library of an imposing graystone house in Champleyne Street.

In front of him a spacious bow-window afforded a pleasing vista of the Green Park. The library was a favorite retreat of his, a peaceful spot into which scarcely any sound could penetrate. There was nothing to break the silence, save the chirping of sparrows and a faint murmur of traffic from the streets where London's millions were jamming themselves almost inextricably together in pursuit of pleasure or of business.

Dr. Abbas, to give him the name by which he was known to a goodly

section of London's society, was a man of striking appearance. He was in the prime of life, tall, with the broad shoulders and slim waist of an athlete. His dark, slightly curly hair and olive-tinged complexion hinted that he must first have seen the light under sunnier skies than those of Europe. The firmly molded mouth and chin betokened possession of a will indomitable and irresistible. Below the intellectual forehead the steady, steel-gray eyes, a little sunken in their sockets as though from intense study, were kindly, but a little sad in expression. Their glance was singularly penetrating: as a woman had once phrased it, they seemed capable of piercing the inmost secrets of a soul.

The room in which he sat was divided by a massive pair of folding-doors into two portions. That fronting the park had been furnished as the sanetum of a wealthy scholar. Lofty mahogany bookcases, filled with handsomely bound books on every conceivable subject, and in several languages, lined the paneled walls. In the available space left by the bookcases hung a collection of valuable prints. Roomy armchairs and priceless Eastern rugs upon the polished floor completed this portion of the room's equipment.

That half of the apartment which lay beyond the folding-doors was more remarkable. No one entered it, except its owner and his confidential secretary, Mr. Hyrax. It had been fitted up as a laboratory. There, in addition to a complete installation of the latest experimental apparatus known to present-day science, one might have observed appliances which would have puzzled even an up-to-date scientist.

At the far end of the room, its porcelain stove-pipe leading into an adjacent chimney, stood an athanor, that curious furnace of the ancient alchemists, shaped like the miniature model of a castle. Scattered about upon tables were crucibles and long-tubed, bulbous alembics. There were aludels, and pelicans—queer bottle-shaped contrivances for heating substances in the furnace.

The mural decoration was equally noticeable: a set of beautifully colored reproductions of the Mystic Pictures from *Splendor Solis*. Along one side of the chamber ran a bookshelf loaded with ancient vellum-bound tomes bearing strange, uncanny titles; such as *The Golden Tractate of Hermes Trismegistos*, *The Water-Stone of the Wise*, *The Chrysopæia of Cleopatra*.

Though there was about Dr. Abbas, clad in his well cut light-gray suit, nothing suggestive of the traditional

wizard, there clung around him, nevertheless, an atmosphere of mystery which Society (spelt with a big S) found vastly intriguing. He was, undoubtedly, one of the sensations of a particularly brilliant season. He had arrived in England some two months before, from nowhere in particular, with unexceptionable introductions from personages in high places living abroad. He had purchased Champleyne House, the gloomy mansion of the Duke of Champleyne, at His Grace's own price. Messrs. Catley and Wotherspoon, the well-known house-furnishers and decorators, had been given *carte blanche*; and an army of skilled workmen had descended like a swarm of locusts upon the somber edifice. As at the touch of a magician's wand it had been speedily transformed into a palace. It was said that several of the great gaunt rooms had been sumptuously embellished after the manner of ancient Egypt; it had even been jestingly affirmed that nothing but lack of space had precluded Messrs. Catley and Wotherspoon from completing their scheme of decoration with a pyramid!

Directly the house was ready for him its new owner had entered into occupation, and had at once become a celebrity. He had commenced to entertain lavishly, and his gatherings had been noted for the excellence of his chef and the perfect taste of the arrangements. He had come prominently before the public eye by reason of a princely donation to a children's hospital. For children he appeared to cherish an especial fondness. He delighted in giving parties for them; and to one of the grateful parents he had offered this explanation:

"Youth!—dear lady! How can we do enough for it? Youth!—which we all desire, and lose so soon! Surely, that priceless quality which rejuvenates this gray old world should be held sacred!"

IT WAS only natural that about such a man gossip should have been rife. Old Mr. Atterthwaite, the society tatter, chatting with his crony, the Countess of Orpington, commented:

"A most astounding person! Seems to be richer than Rockefeller! Knows every language under the sun: he was speaking fluent Chinese at the embassy reception the other night! Really, one begins to wonder—one's almost reminded—"

Mr. Atterthwaite's voice trailed away in a mysterious murmur.

The countess broke in exasperatedly: "Bless the man! What's all this hawing and hinting? Can't you say what you mean?"

Her companion finished polishing his eye-glass, fixed it firmly in position, and shot at her the question:

"Did you ever hear of the Comte de Saint-Germain?"

"Never, that I'm aware of. Am I likely to have met him somewhere?"

Her companion chuckled. "Hardly!—unless our friend Abbas is his reincarnation! The count died—or rather, disappeared—toward the end of the Eighteenth Century. He was a favored friend of Louis XV and the Pompadour. No—my point is this: History teaches us that every century provides its Dr. Abbas! Let me see"—Mr. Atterthwaite began checking on his fingers—"in the Seventeenth Century we have a Signor Gualdi suddenly turning up in Venice; in the Eighteenth, the Comte de Saint-Germain in Paris; in the Nineteenth, a Major Fraser, also in Paris; in the Twentieth—do you begin to see?"

"I see that you're talking arrant nonsense!"

"Ah, but is it such nonsense? At any rate, there are interesting points of similarity about these different persons. To begin with, they were all great linguists and travelers. Again, each of them appeared to possess unlimited wealth. Each of them was fond of hinting that he had intimate-

ly known famous people in bygone times—"

The countess broke in again:

"But, good heavens! You surely aren't suggesting—? Tell me, what is this Dr. Abbas doing here?"

"Oh, well, he makes no secret about that. He travels a great deal, and amuses himself picking up curiosities for his private collection. If he wants a thing, he doesn't mind paying for it. He gave a huge price for that unique copy of *Robinson Crusoe* at Parritch's the other day, if you remember."

"I saw something about it in the newspapers."

Mr. Atterthwaite chuckled again. "Would you believe it, he actually told Parritch that the book had formerly belonged to him, that he had lost it, and that his name had been inscribed by the author upon the fly-leaf!"

"Good gracious! The man must be mad!"

"One would think so. And yet—this is the curious part of it—the name 'Abbas' was certainly there, written in old crabbed characters! I saw it myself!"

Mr. Atterthwaite paused to enjoy his little sensation. Then he resumed:

"As I was saying just now, it is one of the characteristics, this claiming of acquaintanceship with dead and gone celebrities. I'll give you one more instance. At the club the other evening Rudge, the archeologist, was talking about the recent Nebuchadnezzar discoveries on the site of ancient Babylon. Abbas was sitting close to us, apparently half asleep. Well, I distinctly heard him mutter: '*Nebuchadnezzar—ah, yes, he was there after my time.*' Now, what do you make of that?"

"Obviously, the man's crazy!" the countess declared decidedly. She added sententiously: "But you can afford to be crazy, if you're a millionaire!"

SERENELY undisturbed by tittle-tattle, Dr. Abbas sat that morning writing in his library.

He finished the last of his letters, and arranged them in a neat pile on the desk. Then he pressed the knob of an electric bell. Almost immediately there came a knock at the door.

"Come in! Come in, my dear Hyrax!" Abbas called, pleasantly. "I've a piece of news for you this morning!"

The door opened, and there entered a quaint figure. The newcomer was a dwarf, not many inches over four feet in height. Like his master he was dressed in ordinary English costume. In spite of his puny stature, the breadth of his chest and shoulders gave indication of colossal strength. His skin was swarthy, and his gray-flecked hair and smartly trimmed beard were those of a man in the early fifties. His benignant features somewhat resembled those of his namesake, the Syrian cony.

He stood for a moment in the center of the room, his dark eyes fixed affectionately on the man at the desk. Abbas drew a chair closer and motioned him to it.

"Sit down, my dear Hyrax, and listen!" he ordered. "I've good news! Another of our lost treasures will soon be restored to us!"

The dwarf's face lighted with eager interest.

"Another? Which of them, Master?" he queried, excitedly.

"The Queen's Pearl!"

"The Queen's Pearl! You have found it?"

"I know where it is. Its recovery is merely a matter of time."

"And where is it, then?"

"At the present moment it is in the possession of Lady Vanning, the widow of the war profiteer. It forms the pendant to her new necklace."

"How did you discover this?"

"Through her daughter." Abbas reached for a box of cigarettes, lit one, and pushed the box toward his com-

panion. He leaned back in his chair and continued: "Miss Charmion Vanning is, of course, quite unaware that she was my informant."

Hyrax raised his eyebrows. "Charmion!" he murmured. "That is strange!"

"Yes, is it not? Strange that she should bear today the name she bore those centuries ago, when first she coveted the Queen's Pearl! It was her name that first attracted my attention. And then, I read her mind—and knew!"

"Master! It is wonderful! When I recall how we have searched the cities of the world——!"

Abbas, smiling at the little man's enthusiasm, finished his sentence for him.

"It is wonderful to find our quest ended in London? You are right! But is it not still more wonderful to reflect how, throughout the years, her spirit has hovered near the object of its desire?—And now she will be the instrument to restore the Queen's Pearl to its rightful owner."

"How will you manage that?"

"There will be no difficulty. She will lunch here today to inspect my jewels, and I shall give her her instructions. Her mind will be open to influence. She is jewel-mad, like her predecessor. One meets them sometimes—women who will sell themselves for diamonds! Think of it, Hyrax! For diamonds—those nodules of pure crystallized carbon which you and I make when we require them!" Abbas waved a hand in the direction of the laboratory.

"Will you need my help?" his companion asked, after a pause.

"Most certainly! We must have a replica. We are not robbers, my friend, and Lady Vanning must have in exchange a pearl of equal intrinsic value. It will be for you to find me one."

The dwarf considered for a moment.

"Vartier, the Paris jeweler, has two such pearls," he said, at length.

“Paragon pearls of a similar size and purity. He hopes to sell them to an Eastern potentate. He values each of them at seventy-five thousand pounds.”

“No more than that? The price has not altered greatly! Four hundred Greek talents was the price the queen paid, if I recollect rightly. Well, see to it, then, my good Hyrax—and remember, there must be no stinting of money.”

The dwarf nodded. Then he said: “There is one small difficulty. The setting—the design of the golden clasp?”

“That need not trouble you. Miss Vanning will make for us an exact drawing of her mother’s pendant.”

Hyrax grinned. “In the magnetic sleep?”

“Of course! The method of our old friend, Friedrich Mesmer.”

“I see. And when will the replica be required?”

“On this day week. The night of my Egyptian *Soirée*. Lady Vanning and her daughter will be among the company. I shall stage a little diversion for my guests’ amusement, and at the end of it the Queen’s Pearl will be once more in our keeping.”

Hyrax chuckled. “A brief exhibition of collective hypnotism, I suppose?”

“Precisely! Is it not strange how little is known about that subject? Certain savants have, of course, admitted that it is often easier to hypnotize a crowd than an individual. It is the true explanation of the Indian rope trick. To a certain extent all great orators have the power. One has only to consider the enormous sale of patent medicines to comprehend the readiness of the human mind to receive suggestions!”

As Abbas finished speaking, the dwarf leaned forward, intently studying his master’s face. He glanced at the buhl clock on the mantelpiece, and rose briskly from his chair.

“It is time for the drops!” he announced.

Abbas looked at his watch. “Already?—But yes, I feel the change approaching.” He sighed. “The effects of the elixir last less long than they were wont to do: the years are taking their toll!”

WHILST his companion hurried into the laboratory, a startling change came over the figure seated at the desk. It was as though old age were suddenly descending upon it. The broad shoulders began to droop forward. The clothing began to sag around the shrinking body. There were lines forming round the slackening muscles of the firmly cut jaws. An expression of age-long weariness crept into the steel-gray eyes.

But at that moment the dwarf reappeared through the doorway. In one hand he held a tiny crystal phial filled with bright ruby-colored liquid, in the other a tube of shining metal—the “golden conduit” of the ancient philosophers. With the deftness of long practise he inserted the tube between his master’s lips and poured through it the contents of the phial.

The effect was magical. Whilst he stood watching, life flowed back into the shrunken frame. The lines were smoothed away. His master sat before him rejuvenated.

Abbas took from him the phial, and allowed a shaft of sunlight to play on the few remaining drops of wine-red liquor sparkling at the bottom.

“My marvelous elixir!” he cried, exultantly. “Giver of youth! Renewer of life! Powerless, indeed, to arrest forever death which must inevitably overcome us all; but mighty enough to postpone death’s onset, to prolong our period for knowledge! How many illustrious men have sought for thee? Hermes, the first Master; Avicenna; Roger Bacon—the names are legion! Men who have grown old seeking to find that ‘per-

fect gold', the Philosopher's Stone, which is the basis of thy being!"

He abruptly ceased his rhapsody, and looked apologetically at his companion.

"Forgive me, my friend!" he said. "While the spell is on me, I forget that we live now in prosaic times!"

"The elixir deserves all that you have said of it," Hyrax asserted, warmly.

"True! And yet, you would not fully avail yourself of its powers? It was by your own wish that its action was suspended so as to leave you to outward appearances fifty-five!"

Hyrax made a slight gesture of annoyance.

"Fifty-three!" he corrected. "Yes, it was my wish. I was never young; and, with my face and form, a few gray hairs command respect."

"Ah, I understand. And, after all, what does it matter? We have, I trust, a long span yet during which to go down the centuries together—we who age less in a year than the average man in an hour! What are these ordinary human beings to us? No more than *homunculi*—those minute creatures whom dear old Paracelsus hoped to create artificially! You remember?"

"He explained his theory the night we supped with him at his house in Basle."

"So he did! After our return from Damascus. That was a good many years ago?"

Hyrax reflected for a few seconds.

"Exactly four hundred and seven years on the thirty-first of March next," he replied, gravely.

Abbas laughed. "You were always meticulously precise about your dates! Was it as recently as that? I recollect that after supper we had some slight discussion——"

Hyrax interjected dryly: "Your discussion lasted uninterruptedly for two whole nights and a day!" He stifled a yawn at the recollection.

Abbas laughed again. "Quite possibly! In those days dialectics, like travel, were less hurried. But I was always argumentative: even as a school-boy at Memphis, when Rameses the Second was king. How I used to hate his supercilious face and his ridiculously long neck!—But it is nearly lunch time; our guest will be arriving."

WHEN Miss Vanning reached the house ten minutes later, she was agreeably surprised to learn that she was to have a *tête-à-tête* meal with her host.

She was a brunette of twenty-four, dressed, coiffured and painted after the fashion affected by the young folk of the ultra-smart set to which she belonged. On her handsome, discontented face had been set the seal of the Great God Jazz.

To her host's secret amusement, it quickly became evident that Charmion Vanning was laying herself out to fascinate him. As a matter of fact, she frankly admitted to herself that he had interested her from the time when she had first met him. He was handsome, mysterious and, so far as she could judge, the possessor of illimitable wealth. He was apparently unmarried; and though, as she knew, there were dozens of women ready to come at his call, he never appeared to trouble himself about them. She flattered herself that, of late, he had been anxious to seek her company. And while she realized that he was, as yet, not in love with her, she had begun to wonder. . . .

During a luxurious repast, of which her host ate sparingly, she thought her mystery man more than ever attractive. He entertained her with stories of his travels, and described a Sixteenth Century *château* in France which he was thinking of buying. If he did, he said, she and her mother must some day pay him a visit.

"And now I must show you my little collection of jewels," he wound

up, as he rose and opened the door for her. "I keep them in a special room designed to display their beauty to the best advantage."

He led the way up a flight of softly carpeted stairs, and ushered her into a small room with windows facing the park.

Charmion Vanning stared about her in astonishment. Never had she seen such a place. The floor and ceiling were of sun-colored Italian marble, and the walls of dark green marble from Africa. At the end farthest from the windows was a pool of snow-white alabaster, in which Japanese goldfish were swimming lazily in the water plashing from a fountain of wrought silver. Round the room were glass-topped cabinets of polished cedarwood, in which she could see sparkling and coruscating the facet-glint of precious stones set in bracelets, collars and rings of innumerable designs, modern and antique.

Her host smiled at her gasp of wonder, and crossed over to a window, where a huge bronze bowl of exquisite roses stood on a carved ivory table. He put a few of them together into a bunch, and offered it to her.

"What lovely flowers!" she exclaimed. "But surely, they are not English?"

"No. They arrived yesterday by air-post from my villa garden near Damascus."

Charmion Vanning laughed, a little nervously. "You amazing person! There's this—this palace; you've been talking of a French *château*; and now there's a villa at Damascus! How many houses have you?"

"Really, I haven't counted them lately," Abbas replied, uninterestedly. "I find it convenient to have some sort of *piéd-à-terre* in several of the principal cities. But, allow me!—those flowers of yours should have a sweeter perfume."

He drew from his pocket a phial, and sprinkled a few drops of liquid on the bunch of roses she was holding.

W. T.—3

Instantly, their fragrance increased, and two of the buds unclosed.

"This tincture will also impart an added luster to metals," he remarked. "Watch!"

He let fall a drop or two on the bronze bowl, which commenced to shine with the bright red glow of a fire.

In spite of her habitual *sang-froid* Charmion Vanning felt her senses reeling.

"Are you—are you a magician?" she stammered, breathlessly.

Her host's cheery answer reassured her.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed. "I dabble a little in chemistry, that is all! The tincture was discovered by a staid old alchemist several hundred years ago. He named it 'The Red Lion'. — Do you mind if I draw the curtains? I always think that precious stones look their best by artificial light."

She nodded consent, and he drew a pair of heavy black velvet curtains across the windows. He pressed a switch, and the room became flooded with radiance from an inverted bowl of carnelian-onyx suspended from the ceiling.

She caught her breath sharply, as the light was flashed back in scintillating, many-colored flame from the ornaments clustered in the cabinets.

He began to tell her their histories. That great emerald set in a plaque of solid gold had been the turban-jewel of an ancient Emperor of the East. That fire-opal ring had been taken from the finger of a dead Aztec chief by one of the *conquistadores* in Mexico. Charmion Vanning listened to him spellbound. She had quite recovered her self-possession. Her lips were parted, her cheeks were flushed with excitement as she held a glittering diamond pendant against the soft white material of her frock, or clasped a sapphire-studded bracelet round a slim wrist.

Now and again, a look of pity mixed with disdain passed over Abbas' face as he watched her. How many other women had he seen, throughout the ages, ready to sell themselves for baubles such as these!

He left her examining them, and unlocked a small steel safe let into the wall. From it he took a casket of gold filigree-work, and brought it back to where she was standing. He opened the lid, and again a cry of wonder burst from her.

In the casket were compartments filled with cut and uncut gems of every variety. In one compartment there was nothing but pearls.

She bent over them, gloating. "Oh, the pearls!" she cried. "May I touch them?"

Without waiting for an answer she plunged her fingers into the casket, drew out a handful, and let them pour slowly back in a silvery stream, sensing voluptuously their satinlike texture as they tinkled into their sanctuary.

"The pearls!" she cried again, an almost hysterical note in her voice. "There is nothing like them! I could sell my soul for pearls!"

Abbas spoke, harshly sardonic. "A rash offer! And your soul would not be worth much at such a price!"

She did not seem to be listening. "Often when I dream, it is of pearls!" she went on. "There is something—something that I can't explain——"

Abbas was regarding her intently. He took a step nearer, and dropped his voice to a whisper.

"Shall I explain to you? It is of one great pearl that you dream! And now you shall dream of it—for me!" His tone changed sharply to one of imperious command. "Look at me!"

She glanced up at him, startled and mutinous. His steel-gray eyes were fixed on her. Their pupils had narrowed to points: it was as though a light were shining behind them. A feeling of intense drowsiness stole

over her. Under that unwavering, compelling gaze her own eyes closed.

Abbas took her gently by the hand, and led her unresisting to a couch near the window.

"Sleep!" he ordered. "Sleep until I bid you wake—but answer my questions! Do you hear me?"

The reply appeared to come from a far distance.

"Master—I hear."

"Then, listen! You will dream of the Queen's Pearl. The great pearl which the queen gave to me in days gone by. Can you see it?"

"I can see it—Master."

"Where is it now?"

"In a house. In our house in Bevern Square. It forms the pendant of a necklace."

"To whom does it rightfully belong?"

There came no answer. Abbas' face grew stern.

"So you will not tell me?—because your spirit has never ceased from coveting it? Dare you oppose your will to mine? I command you to tell me—whose is that pearl?"

The answer came, dragged from reluctant lips.

"The queen—gave it—to you."

"You speak truly! The queen gave it to me. It is mine! Will you help me to recover that which is my own?"

"I will do—what you command."

"That is well! And now, make for me an exact drawing of the golden clasp in which the pearl is set. Be careful!"

He placed a sheet of paper and a pencil beside the sleeping girl, and waited patiently while she traced the design. When she had finished, he tucked the paper into his pocketbook and waved a hand lightly across her face.

"Wake, now!" he ordered. "Remember nothing of what has passed; but when the time is come—obey!"

A few seconds later Charmion Vanning found herself seated on the couch close to the open window. The

curtains had been drawn aside, and the room was lighted by the rays of the afternoon sun. Her host was bending over her with a look of concern.

"You were feeling faint, I'm afraid?" he asked, solicitously. "The heat of the room, perhaps; or the scent of the flowers?"

She passed a hand over her forehead, bewildered; then forced a laugh.

"How silly of me! I'm not given to fainting! It must have been the heat. I've been racketing a good deal, lately——"

Abbas shook his head reprovingly. "Ah, these late nights! Still, I can't help feeling a little guilty!"

He took from his pocket a necklet of sapphires in an antique setting which she had been admiring, and continued:

"Will you do me the honor of accepting this as a memento of your visit?"

Her eyes sparkled. "For me? How lovely of you! Do you really mean it?"

Abbas inclined his head courteously. "Certainly, if you will permit me. But I must first have the clasp seen to. That's how these things get lost. A defective clasp, the least little jerk, and they drop off and are gone!"

THERE was an air of expectancy about the guests assembled at Champleyne House on the night of Dr. Abbas' *Soirée* which argued well for the success of the entertainment.

The invitation cards had borne the legend: "A Night in Ancient Egypt"—and, in accordance with their host's desire, most of those present were in Eastern costumes. The ladies especially had let themselves go in the matter of exotic adornment, and the brilliantly lighted salons blazed with a dazzle of jewelry.

Word had gone round that in addition to the amusements customary at such functions, the guests would wit-

ness something entirely novel. Some people had even gone so far as to hint darkly at an exhibition of magic; and on that subject the Countess of Orington had spoken in no uncertain manner to her escort, Mr. Atterthwaite, who was looking portly and rubicund in the robes of a priest of Ra.

"If this Abbas man turns himself into the Devil, or anything of that kind," she had given warning, "I shall send for my car and go straight home!"

However, it was not until after supper that their host afforded his guests any knowledge of what was in store for them. Then, a tall, imposing figure in the uniform of a captain of the Ptolemaic body-guard, he addressed the company.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "by means of a method of my own I propose to show you some old-time scenes of the land of my birth. Scenes from the life-story of Antony and Cleopatra."

"That sounds interesting!" drawled a pretty woman with the vacuous features of a doll. "Didn't somebody write a play about them? Shakespeare? Or was it Shaw?"

Abbas laughed. "I promise you that my presentation will be entirely original! May I ask you all to follow me into the room I call my Egyptian court?"

He conducted them to a spacious hall, in which were divans and piles of silken cushions. Along each side of it were carved pillars of cypress-wood, in shape resembling those of the ruined temple of Karnak. One end of it was screened from view by curtains. The only illumination was a pale phosphorescent light round the tops of the pillars.

As the guests, amused and chattering, seated themselves, there drifted through the curtains an aromatic perfume, drowsy and enervating. As though from afar came faint strains

of barbaric music, a haunting melody of half-tones.

In a clear, solemn voice their host began to speak.

"The hymn to Ra, the Sun God. His emblem was a disk; and gazing upon it his worshipers were wont to pass from the world in which they lived into another. Come, let me show you."

He swept aside the curtains. In the dim light his audience could see an arched recess. In the middle of it smoldered a great four-legged censer; and above the censer, poised in midair, revolved a disk of metal shining with a dull red glow spinning round an invisible axis. And, while they watched, its speed increased: faster and faster it whirled, until there was no longer any sign of motion, its red glow changing from the glare of a fire to the dazzling incandescence of the electric arc. The aroma of incense became stronger.

The minutes passed. From where he stood facing them Abbas looked down upon his guests. Their chatter had died away. There was deep silence. Not one of them moved. From that room filled with people there came no sound, save the sound of their breathing. Like automata they sat, straining forward, their gaze riveted on that white-hot point of luminosity. Except that their eyes were wide open, one would have said that they were sleeping.

He turned, and raised his arms above his head. Instantly, dense wreaths of white smoke began to curl upward from the censer and roll billowing forward into the space between the curtains. Then, as if flung upon a vast ivory screen, there grew there, vivid and distinct, the pictures of an age gone by. . . .

NIGHT had fallen. From the full moon riding high in the dark blue vault there poured a flood of radiance silvering the waters of a river where they widened into the still

surface of a lake. Away to the left the myriad lights of the great city of Tarsus twinkled against the velvet-shadowed slopes of the hills.

Anchored upon the shimmering bosom of the lake lay the state-galley of the queen. Only that morning her crew of toiling oarsmen, laboring under the whips of their task-masters at the triple banks of silver-mounted sweeps, had brought her to her moorage. But now the sails of Tyrian purple, with their cordage and tassels of silver, drooped idly, scarcely stirred by the soft, warm breeze from the north.

It was a vessel fit for a queen! Cunning artificers, working with rare woods and metals and precious stones, had contrived upon it pavilions and saloons, colonnaded courts and shrines. Below the main deck was the banqueting-hall of cedar covered thickly with gold-leaf, carpeted with fresh roses into which, a few hours since, the feet of the banqueters had sunk ankle-deep as they passed to their cushioned lounges.

Above the stern there towered a shelter fashioned from plates of burnished gold. It was shaped like the head of a gigantic elephant, its trunk upraised in the air. The flickering blaze of the torches fixed in their silver sconces to the bulwarks, flashed from its plates in shafts of lambent flame.

In front of it, on a massive ebony pedestal, a golden thurible filled the still air with the languorous scent of kyphi balls—that famed Egyptian incense compounded by myrrh and juniper berries, mastic and honey and grapes—their perfumes mingling with the fragrance of the cedarwood and roses, the powdered cinnamon in the women's hair.

From the fore-part of the vessel came the sound of music, of flutes and tambourines, the ripple of seven-stringed harps, timed by the rhythmic tapping of the drums and the jingling of holy systra, their metal rods rat-

ting in their horse-shoe frames. The song was a chant to Nephthys, sister of Isis, goddess of the dusk.

Round the great shelter were grouped the queen's attendants: officers of the Guard, gigantic Nubian slaves, women with forms such as Praxiteles might have chosen for his art. The dark-browed beauty wielding an enormous fan of ostrich-feathers, her downcast eyes fixed hungrily on the queen's jewels, might have been Charmion Vanning. Boys dressed as cupids flitted among the guests bearing goblets brimming with mellow wine—Falernian and the rare Phenician vintage of Gebal Byblos.

On a gem-encrusted couch, against pillows of cloth of gold, her rounded limbs gleaming through robes of diaphanous silk, reclined the queen—Cleopatra, august daughter of the Ptolemies, ruler of Egypt. Venus incarnate from her dainty, dark-haired head to her tiny, jewel-sandaled feet. Seductive, fearless, radiant in the pride of her all-conquering loveliness.

Her eyes, dark fathomless pools, regarded quizzically the man seated by her side—a man clad in rich garments with the muscles of a gladiator, a broad forehead and firm mouth, but with something of the appearance of an over-grown child.

Above the sound of the chant her voice rang clear as the tone of a bell.

"Thou speakest of love, mighty Antony; and truly, it is what most mortals crave for! But I tell thee, there is yet another gift of the Gods which is more to be desired than love!"

He glanced around him at that scene of splendid, wanton luxury, and asked:

"Is it wealth, oh Egypt?"

A scornful smile curved the exquisite lips. "Wealth!" she cried. "Dost thou indeed believe that wealth is lasting?" A freakish look passed over her countenance. "Come, let me give thee proof!"

She clapped her hands, and a mo-

ment later an attendant knelt before her proffering a golden chalice.

With a twist of delicate fingers she unfastened one of her earrings, a pearl the size of a small walnut, and let it fall into the cup. With cynical eyes she watched the pearl dissolve.

"See how a drop of vinegar can devour a fortune!" she exulted. Slowly she circled the cup, then raised it to her lips.

"To thy health—and thy deeper understanding, oh Antony!" she mocked, and quaffed the potion.

Her voice sank to a whisper. "Nay, that which is more enduring than love or riches is—power!"

THERE was a pause while Abbas again surveyed that silent company. His gaze sought for and held the glassy stare of Charmion Vanning where she sat beside her mother. The lines of his face set grim in an intense concentration of will. He saw her start and quiver, as though at a shock from an electric battery. Then, slowly, one of her hands began to move.

Once more he raised his arms, and the scene changed. . . .

In a grove of cypresses and sycamores there stood a miniature pavilion, its alabaster dome supported on pillars of porphyry. In front was a terrace with a marble balustrade; and far below, beyond the wooded slopes of the mountain, stretched the lake on which the galley still rode lazily at anchor.

It was the hour before sunrise. Already on the horizon gray skies were breaking into rosy light. There was scarcely a sound: only the distant croaking of frogs by the margin of the lake, the chirping of newly awakened birds, the call of a sentry answering the challenge of the guard.

The door of the pavilion opened, and the queen came forth clad in a Grecian robe of pure white silk spangled with gold. She walked toward the balustrade, and leaned there watching the dawn.

She turned, as a tall figure in the uniform of a captain of the Guard strode through the bushes, crossed the terrace and knelt on one knee before her.

"Lo, I have come as I was bidden," he said, in a voice broken by emotion. "But must it be farewell, oh my Queen?"

She bowed her head in assent.

"It is, in truth, farewell, Abbas, my lover! Destiny lies with the Gods; and Egypt hath more need of powerful friends than her sovereign of lovers!—Yet, memory is sweet! I leave thee this for a token."

From a fold in her robe she drew a great pearl earring, and laid it in his palm.

Then, as he sprang erect, she waved him imperiously back.

"Nay, follow me not!" she commanded. Her voice grew swiftly tender: "Lest at this hour I prove myself more of a woman than a queen! Farewell!"

She passed into the shade of the cypresses—and was gone.

WITH the confused babel of a theater audience transported back to reality by the fall of the curtain on an absorbing play, Dr. Abbas' guests awoke from their trance. And this was strange!—not one of them seemed to realize that he had been through an unusual experience.

The vast hall was ablaze with light, and somewhere in the house a band was playing the latest dance music. One heard the customary comments: "Wasn't it interesting?"—"How do you suppose it was done?"

All at once, above the chatter rose the hysterical cry of a woman:

"My pearls! My pearls! Someone has taken my necklace!"

There was a hush of consternation. Everyone looked to where Lady Vanning was standing beside her daughter.

"My necklace is gone!" she repeated. "I was so engrossed in watching—but I recollect now that in the darkness I felt as if someone's fingers—"

She spoke sharply to her daughter: "Charmion, did you notice anyone touch me?"

Before her daughter could reply she heard her host speaking behind her.

"Fortunately, it has not gone very far, Lady Vanning," he said, as he stooped behind her chair, then rose and handed her the necklace with a smile. "I'm afraid the clasp must be defective. You should speak severely to your jewelers!"

AFTER his guests had departed, Dr. Abbas sat for a long while alone in his library. Before him on the table lay the great pearl.

He could see again in fancy the galley moored on the lake, the terraced garden before the dawn.

"Shakespeare knew how to word it!" he murmured:

"The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne
Burnt on the water; the poop was beaten gold,
Purple the sails, and so perfumèd that
The winds were love-sick——"

He sighed deeply. "Ah, my Queen! For thy country's sake thou chocest power rather than love! Didst thou choose wisely?"

