

Weird Tales

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Contents for June, 1925

- Cover Design Andrew Brosnatch
- Monsters of the Pit Paul S. Powers 341
A Thrilling Tale of Gigantic Spiders
- The Devil-God Frank Belknap Long, Jr. 349
The King Read Poetry, so the State Took Measures to Protect Itself
- Black Hill Frank Owen 357
The Golden Buddha Brought Misery and Terror to Cass Ledyard
- The Third Thumb-print Mortimer Levitan 369
A Scientist Makes a Horrifying Discovery About Himself
- Marble Laurence D'Orsay 375
Evil Was the Brilliant and Inventive Mind of This Physician

(Continued on Next Page)

(Continued from Preceding Page)

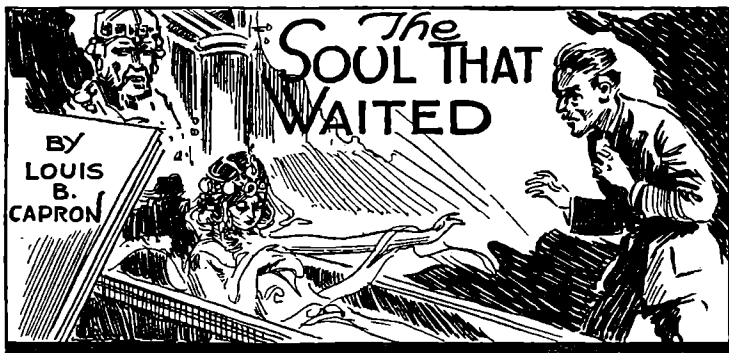
- The Clock** ----- **Arthur Styron 382**
A Five-Minute Story of a Terrible Obsession
- The Soul That Waited** ----- **Louis B. Capron 385**
A Passion for a Mummy—a Love That Bridged the Centuries
- An Arc of Direction** ----- **Junius B. Smith 393**
His Horoscope Said He Would Be Hanged on a Certain Day
- Hurled Into the Infinite (First Part)** ----- **J. Schlossel 397**
Two-Part Astronomical Story
- The Witch of Kravetz** ----- **Michael V. Simko 415**
A Barbarous Russian Custom—and a Famous Beauty
- Lips of the Dead** ----- **W. J. Stamper 422**
A Gruesome Tale From the History of Haiti
- The House, the Light, and the Man** .. **Gordon Philip England 427**
A Specter Rose From the Coffin—and the Man's Mind Gave Way
- Invaders From the Dark (Conclusion)** ----- **Greya La Spina 431**
Serial Novel of Werewolves and Occult Powers of Evil
- Loo Tun Sin** ----- **Everett Boston 450**
The Dawn Clouded the Moon With Trouble, so Loo Marred the Dawn
- Strange Tales From Santo Domingo** ----- **Arthur J. Burks 453**
No. 5. The Phantom Chibo.
The Bandit José Espinosa Lures His Victims to a Quagmire
- Dead Hands** ----- **Walter G. Detrick 458**
They Stretched From the Grave, These Hands of His Grandmother
- Servants of Satan** ----- **Seabury Quinn 463**
No. 4. George Burroughs, Martyr.
True Tale of New England Witchcraft
- The Hanging of Aspara** ----- **Leavenworth Macnab 468**
Sensational Newspaper Hoaxes Give Tang to an Execution
- The Eyrie** ----- **472**
A Chat With the Readers

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WEIRD TALES

317 Baldwin Building

Indianapolis, Ind.



Boston, Mass.,
July 26, 1924.

ROBERT N. WILLIS, Attorney
at Law,
New York City.

Dear Sir:

Yours of the 15th inst. received requesting information regarding Thornton Hartley. You say that you have been retained to defend the will which some of the relatives are endeavoring to break on the grounds of insanity.

Mr. Hartley was no more insane than I am. I was his best friend and am acquainted with the circumstances which led up to the making of his curious will.

I believe that the opposing relatives are basing their assertion on the clause relating to the disposal of the body. Knowing the circumstances, I do not think that this is more strange than a clause would have been directing the erection of a certain type of tombstone.

If you are at all acquainted with Egyptian antiquities, you know that this was the usual mode of burial among the higher class of the ancient people. I know of the Egyptian whom he designates to embalm his body. This man has studied the ancient practise and is, in my opinion,

capable of performing it. In view of the time required, the difficulty of the art and the cost of the necessary drugs and spices, I do not consider his price of \$10,000 exorbitant.

The tomb in which he wishes his body to be sealed was purchased by Mr. Hartley a year ago from the Egyptian government, together with the land about it. The deed must be among his papers.

I certainly believe that, in view of his convictions at the time of his death, his wishes in this matter should be respected.

I enclose a series of letters from him which may throw a bit of light on the situation. Please return them when you have finished, as they are the last he ever wrote me.

If there is any other way in which I may be of assistance, do not fail to call upon me.

Very truly yours,
John S. Mills.

1

Cairo, Egypt.

DEAR JACK:

Your archeological soul would positively revel in Cairo this year. They have opened three new tombs (unofficially, up the river) and the

shops are glutted with all sorts of wonderful things—and cheap, too. It's not the season for tourists and you can pick up what you want for a song—if you can barter à l' *Egypte*.

Come on—leave that dry-as-dust monograph on Egypt of the Ptolemies and sun yourself in the land itself. That important (?) treatise can wait—forever, and the world will never miss it. But you can only live once. Come on, you withered fossil, “eat of the lotus” as I have done and forget your troubles.

And if you must collect—why, collect! Heaven knows there was never a better time. If you won't come and loaf, come and work. Take my word for it, you can pick up treasures for your musty old museum on every side.

Why (and now turn sea-green with envy), only this afternoon I found a wonder—a ring—turquoise in a silver setting, but carved (imagine it!) with a head—a woman's head!

Yes, I know it's impossible—that it wasn't done—and that it's a fake. But it isn't. The dealer didn't call the gods to witness that it was genuine. He went out and got the man who brought it down the river, and the man was too ignorant to lie. So I believe.

And you can't have it for your collection! So don't try to belittle it.

I place it during the Empire. I can't figure just where, but the hair is dressed in the fashion of that period. It's a wonder. I mean the ring, of course, but the same describes the face, which is unbelievably life-like.

Jack, old man, if you could show me a woman like that today you'd never have the chance to call me a “cold proposition” and impervious to feminine charm. Why, I half believe I'm in love with her now.

Laugh, darn you, laugh! I guess I have a right to fall in love with a woman three or four thousand years

old if my wayward heart is so impelled. At any rate it's safer than to lose my head over a girl of the present day, and interferes less with my own work and (oh, I admit it!) pleasure.

Her name is Nitocris. It's carved in a cartouche in the back of the stone. Of course, it can't be the Nitocris of Babylonian fame, and she is far too sweet to be the Nitocris of Egypt who retaliated in kind on the murderers of her brother. No, Jack, it's some other Nitocris.

Well, since you have been so kind as to let me rave, I'll repeat my invitation. Come and join me here in paradise. If you don't, may your dusty soul dry up and blow away.

THORN.

2

Cairo, Egypt.

DEAR JACK:

I don't suppose my last has had time to reach you. But this is to prepare you for the coming of a scarab of the Ptolemaic period, which part of Egyptian history you seem to claim *in toto*. Down on your knees and thank me! You're welcome. Arise!

I must tell you of a strange coincidence. Or, after all, I suppose it's neither strange nor a coincidence. Any number of things from a given tomb may drift down to the shops just after the tomb is opened.

You remember the fair vision that adorns a silver ring I spoke of in my last letter? Well, I have something else from the same beautiful unknown. I picked it up yesterday. It's a little votive bowl and I know it was hers because it has the same cartouche that is on the ring. I suppose her husband or some relative must have placed it in the offering room of her tomb filled with food or something. It was empty, of course, when I got it. I shouldn't be surprised if we ourselves ate the contents among the other mummified products that Mrs. Mulkins served her ten “collige”

boys—oh, it wasn't so many years ago.

Her husband! I wonder whether she was married. (Of course I mean Nitocris, not Mrs. Mulkins, who had a husband even if he was a useless incumbrance.) Now, I suppose, you will make my life miserable by accusing me of jealousy. Imagine being jealous of a man long since gone to the gods in whom he believed (or elsewhere), and over a woman who died several thousand years ago!

Oh, yes. I know such an accusation was the farthest thing from your thoughts. But I also know your bantering vein and that it is safest to steal your thunder before you are ready to storm. Still, I can't help wondering whether she *was* married.

She is not Egyptian—or, at least, pure Egyptian. I've studied the features on the ring pretty carefully and they are different. I should say, at a guess, that either she or some of her ancestors came from north of the Mediterranean. But whatever she is, she is beautiful.

I suppose you wouldn't give me a moment's peace if I should fall in love with her, now, would you?

Well, if you'll only join me here you may joke me as much as you like. If my first letter wasn't strong enough, let this persuade you to come.

THORN.

3

Cairo, Egypt.

DOUBTING THOMAS, ESQ.:

I knew you wouldn't believe it. Yea, verily, I swear it is true! There is such a ring—and it's genuine. Otherwise, why should that cartouche turn up so frequently? I've found several things marked with it—one of them a bit of stone, evidently a part of the tomb wall that had been chipped off.

In fact, the fair one from the past is haunting me most inconsiderately. It's almost as if her ring (which, by

the way, I am wearing) attracted other things that have been associated with her. Even when there is nothing to indicate it, I am often sure that I am handling something that came from her tomb.

And, Jack, she was not married! Or, at least, I do not think so. Three days ago I came across a little scrap of papyrus. In fact, a dealer with whom I have done much trading gave it to me as unsalable. It was from her tomb. And, Jack, she is a princess! I might have known it!

Harken unto the papyrus.

Anupu, son of Ramses, the King, hath purchased from the Priests of the Great Temple of Thebes acquittal in the Judgment Hall of Osiris for his sister, Nitocris.

There! Had she been married her husband would have taken care of that. Had her brother been her husband as well (atrocious custom!), he would have called her "wife", not "sister". The only chance is that she had a husband (lucky man!) who died before she did. I am hoping for the best.

Oh, I admit I'm foolish. But I can't help it. I am becoming interested in this woman of ages ago. At first, without any volition on my part, she seemed to be seeking me out. Now I am doing the seeking. I have ransacked every shop in the city and I won't give up until I have solved the mystery.

For it is a mystery, old man, when a princess of centuries gone by "sets her cap" for you—even if she isn't doing it intentionally.

Anyway, I'm going to accept her challenge.

Of course I'm sorry you can't come over now. You could be a lot of help in cutting this Gordian knot. But, selfishly enough, I'm rather glad you can't. You're a bit more ardent than I; and if I am susceptible to her charms, where would you be?—and then I'd have to worry about a rival.

As it is, having disposed of a husband to my entire satisfaction, I'm quite carefree.

But if there is any chance you can come, come ahead and I'll give you a hearty joust for the favor of Miss Nitocris of a thousand odd, B. C.

And, by the way, I haven't the least idea what the "odd" is, for there is no indication of which Ramses had the happiness to be her father.

If you can keep your jibes corked up, I'll go on giving you the history of my "wild romance," but any more references to "the sparkling eye of withered age" and you shall never, never meet the charming bride I am going to conjure from the mists of antiquity—which is not to say that I shall meet her myself.

THORN.

4

Cairo, Egypt.

SIR SKEPTIC:

I've seen her—what have you to say to that? That is, I've seen her statue. It's in the Cairo museum. It is evidently the statue that was placed in the *serdab* of her tomb to do the work she is supposed to do in the Valley of Yaru. It did the work for me.

Oh, Jack, she's beautiful! The man was an artist who did that statue, restricted though he was by the hereditary Egyptian ideas of art. The ring didn't begin to do her justice. And she's *not* married, for the inscription (there is one) on the statue reads—

Nitocris, the Unwed, Daughter of Ramses, the King.

And there are several other statues grouped with it—evidently most of the family from her chamber of statues. Why, oh, why, was I born three thousand years too late? Call me sentimental, but I wish I had been incarnated a thousand and something, B. C., even if it was only as a sacred

cat, to worship from a distance. For, if a cat may look at a king, it may certainly gaze upon a princess.

As to the finding of the statue, it was due to my own thickheadedness that I did not find it long ago. I might have known that the large furnishings of the tomb could not be smuggled out. As might have been expected, the government confiscated everything it could lay its hands upon (the rifling of the tombs having been unofficial) and put it in the state museum.

There was a brief paragraph in the papers this morning announcing that a new exhibit would be opened to the public this afternoon. Of course I was there—but without an idea that I should see my princess.

I recognized her as soon as I came into the room—and they had to put me out when the doors closed.

Jack, you have no idea of her beauty! The pure Egyptian type is not especially appealing to the Western eye. But that foreign strain in her blood has retained all the good features and added that touch of, I suppose, the Indo-European that brings it to our ideals.

Yet even her statue is more attractive than any woman I have ever met. While the hair and, in a measure, the body have been conventionalized, the face is as perfect as if it were molded from a life mask. She is dressed in the gauzy draperies of ancient Egypt and the sculptor has reproduced them wonderfully well. With all respect, Jack, her body is as beautiful as her face, and the dress of Milady of Old Egypt allowed one to judge.

Jack, I'd give everything I possess if I could play Pygmalion to this Egyptian Galatea and if Venus (or Isis, in this case, I suppose) would only breathe into her statue the breath of life.

Idiotic or not, Jack, tomorrow I am going to look up the men who exca-

vated her tomb and visit it myself. Perhaps I may have real news for you in my next letter.

THORN.

5

Karnak, Egypt.

DEAR JACK:

I've found the tomb, but there are so many important developments that the best thing to do is to tell you everything just as it happened.

It was not easy to find anyone who would admit having been in the party that rifled the tombs, as the police are on the watch for them. Finally, through the dealer who sold me the ring, I found a man, Mehemet Ali, who was willing to take me there—for a consideration.

Curiously enough, her tomb is in the Valley of Kings and not with those of the queens or nobles. The two other tombs that were opened are on the side of the range facing the river, but hers is in the valley itself. The vandals, it seems, saw one corner of the door peeping from a pile of debris that had once more than covered it, but had weathered down. Dynamite, I imagine from the condition of things, was the "Open Sesame," for, of course, the tomb was hermetically sealed.

It was the usual sort of tomb hollowed out of the rock—with one exception. First, was the chapel. The massive stone stele before which the offerings were placed was still in position, but everything else had been removed. I suppose this was too heavy to move, though even it will probably not stay long.

The *serdab* was quite empty. Every statue had been taken from this chamber and the *ka* of my princess (assuming that the soul, or double, if you will does dwell there) must have wept at the barrenness of it.

The curious part of the whole business is this: try as I would, I could not find the shaft that leads down to

the burial chamber. Nor was I especially dense, for pick marks on the walls and floor showed where the discoverers had searched unsuccessfully. They had even pried the great stone stele a little from the wall on the chance that the shaft entrance might be hidden there. But, of course, it was the usual false door built against the solid rock wall.

So, you see, my princess still rests in her sarcophagus safe from vandal hands. And how to reach her tomb is my next problem.

The hieroglyphics? Yes, of course I know all about her now. I won't translate the yards and yards descriptive of her journey through this life and contemplated trials and tribulations in the next. But I'll give you a brief sketch.

Nitocris was the daughter of Ramses I, which would date her about 1315 B. C. Her mother was "of the north," and her representation shows just what I expected—that she is Indo-European. Nitocris was evidently quite a student and more or less of a mystic, I gather from the hieroglyphics. She was "The Unwed" in spite of the fact that she had many suitors (I counted no less than a hundred and thirty-two carved in this interesting page of her sculptured life) because "he will come from a land far to the west." He never came and she died at twenty-three still "The Unwed."

Now if I am the "he" from the "land far to the west" (and I can't help thinking it rather a coincidence), I arrived just about 2,230 years too late. Of course I can plead that I didn't know of the engagement, but no woman could forgive such indifference as that.

THORN.

6

Karnak, Egypt.

DEAR JACK:

I hardly know how to tell you what has happened. I hardly know

what to make of everything myself. I'm afraid you will laugh and call me a sentimental, idiotic fool. You will believe what I say, but you will not believe my interpretation of it—you will explain it all away in a perfectly rational way—something which can't be done. I am in Egypt, and you are in the United States, as many thousand miles away as my princess is years from me—or was, so I thought. Call me a fool, then, if you like, but listen to the story.

She is mine! She is mine in so far as the Egyptian government has authority and power to sell her to me. Yes, I bought her—and I'm ashamed. Yet what else was there to do? Someone else would have found her and then she would have been exhibited in a glass case in some museum for the thousands to gaze upon, while her soul trembled at the immodesty of it.

I bought government permission to excavate the tomb. Money and influence will do wonders—and I have a little of both. The permission, of course, gives me the right to everything I find in the tomb, and her body is still there. I found it. It is mine. Thus far can I claim my princess. And, Jack, there is more. But that later.

I began my search for the burial shaft at once. We went over floor and walls thoroughly again, but with no more success than before. Our lanterns gave very poor light, however, and finally, a week ago, I began an extensive examination with a powerful electric torch.

Finally I found—you will never guess—that the shaft, instead of leading down from the chapel, was in the floor of the *serdab*. One of the pick blows had penetrated to the rock floor and at the bottom of the nick I could just see a faint line of division in the rock.

I called the men at once, and before we left off work that day we had uncovered and removed the stone that

sealed the entrance. The shaft, as usual, had been filled with gravel. Yesterday we finished removing this—a colossal task (it was a fifty-foot shaft); but I couldn't wait and I drove the men like slaves, I'm afraid. Before night we had removed the door to the burial chamber and I let the men go with orders not to report for two days. They had earned a rest and I wanted to examine the chamber myself—alone.

I went over the room carefully. Everything seemed to be intact. Finally, on the cover of the sarcophagus, I found an inscription. The important part reads:

I, Nitocris, Daughter of Ramses, the King, have waited three and twenty years for the man from a land far to the West. The ka left my body and he had not come. I have prayed to Osiris that my ka may not begin the long journey before he comes and Osiris has heard me.

I looked at my watch. It was 11 o'clock. I had been so interested that I had not noticed the passage of time. I might have gone on down to the camp—but I didn't. First, it was very late. Then, I wanted to resume investigations first thing in the morning. And, finally, now that the burial chamber had been uncovered, the tomb was worth robbing again and I could not be sure even of my own men.

So I merely climbed the steps to the *serdab*, found some sacking we had in which to pack anything we might find, and went to sleep on the floor. I had intended to unwrap the mummy this morning, but I have not opened the outer case—and I never shall.

You will call what happened last night an ordinary dream. A dream it may have been. Certainly my mind has been filled with my princess for months. I realize that I am run down from the intensity of the search. I grant that everything had reached a climax and my nerves were near the breaking point.

On the other hand, I assure you that the dream was more vivid than any I ever had. Granted one premise, the Egyptian theory of death, it was logical and consistent. And remember I was sleeping in the *serdab*, the room in which the *ka*—the soul—is supposed to dwell.

I was again conscious of the *serdab*. (That is the best expression I can give to the sensation.) It was exactly as I had seen it last—but there was a presence there. Jack, it was my princess—or her soul. If the face on the ring was beautiful, if the statue was enchanting, words cannot express the beauty and the witchery of the being or vision that now stood before me. I cannot describe her; save that she was beauty itself—all the allurements of the East—all dreams and ideals incarnate. I cannot write about it.

She pleaded with me not to desecrate her tomb. I say she pleaded—yet I do not believe she spoke in words. It seemed as if we had cast off the shackles of language and each was conscious of the other's thoughts.

But her eyes! They were as appealing as those of some wounded fawn; and their soft, dark glance tore my heart-strings apart. Then I knew the depths of self-hate and abasement to which a man may descend. I saw the filth on my hands and the filth in my heart to have broken into the tomb of this radiant being.

And in her eyes was patience—superhuman patience—the patience that had waited, century after century, for "him" that was to come.

Then, suddenly, I knew that at last "he" had come—that I was "he." And I knew that I loved her with all the ardor of my heart and every atom of my being. I knew that I would wait forever for "her"—that she was my heart and my soul—that through eternity I would remember that instant.

And she knew. Golden flames sprang into her eyes. She came to-

ward me. In another moment we two, separated by the ages, would have been in each other's arms—when I was awakened.

It was one of the fellahs. My absence had caused a stir in the camp and they had been afraid something had happened to me.

I suppose the poor man couldn't realize why I sent him packing back to camp so angrily when he had meant it all in kindness. But you can imagine how I felt. And I could not get to sleep again.

Jack, I don't know what to do! It may have been a mere dream, but I incline to the theory that in the subconscious state of sleep I can communicate with her soul. You cannot make me believe otherwise.

Dream or not, I shall sleep in the tomb until she appears again. Even her unreality is stronger than the reality of life.

How the Fates must laugh at this tangle! But I cannot laugh. It has shaken my soul to its depths. Jack, if you have any pity, believe that none deserves it more than I.

THORN.

7

Karnak, Egypt.

DEAR JACK: Do you believe the ancient Egyptians were right in their ideas of religion and the afterlife? I do. I not only believe it, but I swear by my soul that, in the main, their interpretation is true. You may doubt, but I have had incontestable proof. It is useless to try to influence you, I know. You will hold to the God of your fathers and say that my words are the ravings of a madman. Don't ignore the truth! Jack, as you value your immortal soul, see it before it is too late. I know it is impossible to make you believe; but I have seen the light and I want you to see it too. But you never will—until you have been through the fire as I have.

I have bought the tomb and the land about it. I shall not tell you the price I paid the government—you would be convinced of my insanity. You remember Yousef Tauphick in Cairo, who has studied the ancient methods of embalming? He will take charge of my body when I die and my mummy shall be placed in the tomb with Nitocris. All this is taken care of in a new will I have made.

I am restoring as much of the original furniture of the tomb as I can and replacing the rest. All modern science will be employed in sealing it, and it should be safe from vandals until the day of resurrection.

Each night I sleep in the tomb and the days between drag endlessly. Each night she comes to me.

The contrast between the hot days and the cold nights has combined with my run-down condition to give me a

fever. The doctor gives me two months to live unless I come to the city where I can take care of myself. He supposes I want to live!

What would he say if he knew I wanted to die? You, I know, will understand. I pray each day for it to come and come quickly. Then we shall be together, not only when I can sleep, but every hour and every minute.

We are waiting. When my soul shall be freed, we shall begin our journey through the underworld, together, and together we shall stand in the judgment hall of Osiris.

And meantime our bodies will lie side by side, safe in the tomb until the day of resurrection, when our souls will enter them together and we shall be united in life at last.

Good-bye, old friend,

THORN.