

TWO SHALL BE BORN

By Seabury Quinn

Two shall be born the whole wide world apart
And speak in different tongues and have no thought
Each of the other's being and no heed . . .
That some day out of darkness they shall meet
And read life's meaning in each other's eyes.

—Susan Marr Spaulding, *Fate*.

Cold weather had set in, and the quiet street was like a scene from a Christmas card in the November dusk. The moon was very bright; its radiance was powdered silver on the frost-encrusted grass. Soft light filtered through drawn curtains on the neatly-kept front lawns. Somewhere down the block a window had been left open and through it, very clear in the cool tranquil air, a radio picked up a broadcast from Havana, mandolins and violins mourning softly over a tango. The placid beauty of the night was like the sting of salt in a raw wound to Fullerton. "A sorrow's crown of sorrows," he repeated bitterly, "is remembering happier things." Yet what was there to do but remember? Life was flowing backward for him, there was nothing in the future save, perhaps, such patience as a living dead man might command while he waited the actual sundering of flesh and spirit.

For Henry Herbert Fullerton—"H.H.F." beloved of the sports writers and one-time All American left tackle, later South American explorer and still late stock broker—was dead. Not dead the way you were when skilled morticians gave death the appearance of a natural sleep and clergymen droned prayers above you and women wept while soft music was played. Oh, no, not that—the lucky ones died that way! He was just civilly dead—*civiliter mortuus*—a legal corpse, deprived of all the rights of manhood till the state saw fit to restore them. An exconvict.

Like one who sees a motion picture reeled through its projector in reverse he viewed the incidents that marked

the past twelve years. His return from the exploring trip, the offer of the partnership in Smathers, Dirk & Houghton, his partners' endless importunities to bring his friends in on "good things"; his marriage to Millicent with the church banked suffocatingly high with flowers and gawking crowds held back by the police escort. Later, their duplex apartment and the cocktail parties that they threw; whispered market tips and eager friends with avid eyes who fairly forced their money on him. Then October, 1929, the crash, the realization that his trustful friends were ruined, the all-night drinking bout at Gilotti's speak-easy, and the return to his house just in time to meet Millicent and Bob Houghton at the door.

They had laughed at his befuddled questions, made a mock of his remonstrances. "Hold the bag, sucker," Bob had flung across his shoulder as he helped Millicent into the car.

Hold the bag, eh? They'd run out on him, leaving him to face the music, would they? He'd show 'em! When the police picked Bob Houghton up there were four bullet wounds in him, each of which would have been fatal. Not bad shooting for a drunken man. And Millicent was screaming at him, mouthing curses like a fish-wife.

His lawyers pleaded the unwritten law, his drunkenness, finally advised a plea of guilty in the second degree.

Ten years the judge had said. Ten years at hard labor. And the warden took him at his word. No office work, no soft duties for this killer who but for wealth and influence might be waiting for the final summons from the death house. The rock pile, the machine shop and the laundry, these were his portion while the sands of time piled slowly to a pyramid of ten long years. Then they set him free, a ticket to the city in the pocket of his prison-made ill-fitting suit, and the mark of the ex-convict on him. A slight, lean man of thirty-six who looked fifty, gaunt-featured, pewter haired, with the empty, lusterless eyes of a dead man walking.

Millicent had divorced him. Served the papers on him in the penitentiary. With a grim smile he recalled her accusations, "—assault with a deadly weapon—conviction of a

crime involving moral turpitude—” He let the case go by default. Everything she said was true. Once he had tried to kill her; he loved her then, loved her so he’d rather see her dead than gone with Bob Houghton. No matter now. When one is quits with life what difference does it make whether he is married or divorced?

He’d seen her yesterday down on the Avenue, gray eyes aglint beneath the crisping curls of auburn hair, a smart small hat trimmed with cock feathers, a double cross fox scarf draped negligently across her shoulders. She’d passed him by as if he were a bit of wind-blown street-trash, and he had wondered idly that the sight of her stirred neither longing nor resentment in him, that he could look so calmly in that coldly lovely face and feel no quickening of the pulses as he passed within hand’s reach of this woman who had vowed to cleave to him through sorrow and adversity while they both lived.

“But,” he reflected bitterly, “she kept her bargain. One of us is dead; dead legally—*civiliter mortuus*.”

The moonlight glinted on a spot of brightness in the walk before his house, and Fullerton grinned as he marked it. His neighbor up the street, the small dark man who’d moved into the vacant house three doors away, had put that bright tile in his sidewalk the same day he took possession of the premises. Fullerton had noticed it as he went out upon his daily morning walk, a square of brightly finished porcelain, not white nor yet quite green, but a sort of combination of the two, noticeable in the dull-gray of the paving blocks as a cardinal in a flock of blackbirds. It had a figure on it, too, a man with a jackal’s head, like the figures of Anubis he’d seen in the museums. Odd that he should have set a bright tile like that in the gray-stone walk. But then—

Last night was Halloween, the boys in South Brooklyn were like their kind the world over. Out ringing doorbells, stealing trash-cans, blowing beans at unprotected windows. Among their pranks had been the transplantation of the bright tile from his neighbor’s walk to his. Tomorrow he must take it back. Only the diffidence that made him

shrink from meeting people had kept him from restoring it that morning.

He put his hand up to the curtain cord, but delayed pulling it. Freedom to open or shut doors and windows was still a luxury to be savored. "Old Lovelace hadn't served a hitch in the big house when he wrote

'Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage.'

he said ironically, speaking naturally to himself, as lonely men have done since time's beginning. "If he had—what the deuce?" He ended on an interrogatively rising note as a light delivery van crawled down the street, the driver leaning far out of the cab to scan the sidewalks bordering the roadway.

Opposite his door the car came to a halt, and the driver jumped down, crossed the strip of parking and bent down to examine the bright tile. Satisfied with his inspection, apparently, he called to his helper, and walked back to the vehicle, where he began to unlatch the chains holding up its tail gate. In a moment they had drawn out a long packing case and were lugging it up his walk.

"You must have made a mistake," Fullerton insisted as they beat upon his front door with a thunderous knock. "I haven't ordered anything—who's this for?"

The driver and his helper had regained their seats in the car, and looked back at him surlily. "For a man," replied the driver. "See?"

"No, I don't. What's his name and address?"

"Dunno, Mister. Our orders wuz to put that box down at th' door o' th' house wid a fancy tile in its front walk. Didn't have no name or number; just a house in dis block wid a fancy tile. If you ain't th' party it's just too bad, for we ain't luggin' that crate back. See?"

With a wheeze and rattle the old car got underway, and Fullerton was left with the unwanted parcel on his doorstep.

"Now what?" he asked himself. The box was oblong, made of light wood strips reinforced with cross-tied ropes.

There was nothing on it to identify its consignee or consignor. In shape and size it was much like the rough box used to encase the casket at burial. Fullerton felt a slight chill of apprehension as he looked at it. What was he to do with it? The driver had said it was for the man with the bright tile in his sidewalk. That would be his new neighbor. Obviously the thing was too heavy for him to move it unassisted—"But I can't leave it out here all night," he told himself, "it may hold perishable goods." Tentatively he leaned down and took the nearer corners in his hands. Surprisingly, the case moved toward him easily, and he realized it had castors fitted to its lower surface. That simplified things.

Pulling, tugging, panting a little from the exertion, he drew the box across the doorsill and into the front hall. There, it would be safe till morning—

Shoving it with his foot to make a clearance way for the front door, he was astonished at the ease with which it rolled across the polished floor. Not only rolled, but cannoned into the newel post of the staircase. The crackling sound of breaking wood was followed by the tinkle of smashing earthenware, and he looked ruefully at the object exposed by the shattered crate.

Where the box had staved in he could glimpse a dull-white surface scarred by a wide crack. It was hard to make the object out. From its shape it might have been a bathtub, but who'd make a bathtub of fragile earthenware, or encase it in a box unable to withstand a slight jar such as that which smashed this case?

"H'm, maybe I can fix the thing," he muttered, putting back the broken boards. "Perhaps I'd better not try, but—" He couldn't understand it, but a curiosity greater than his powers of resistance seemed to prompt him. Plainly as if he'd heard the words pronounced he became aware that the box held something he must see—quickly.

He drew the boards away, looked down at the baked-clay case they had concealed. Six feet in length it was, and in general appearance it resembled one of those old covered soap-dishes without which no toilet set of the late nineties was complete. The top was slightly convex and

seemed joined to the bottom by a tongue-and-groove joint into which some sort of plaster had been set. An inch or so below the junction of the top and body ran a border of the egg-and-dart design familiar to Greek pottery of the common sort. The whole appeared to have been baked in a brick-kiln, but not thoroughly, for in several places the rough finish had chipped off, leaving pits and indentations on the surface, as though the baking process had added more of brittleness than strength to the clay.

With his knife he dug away the soft cement that sealed the vessel. In a moment he had loosened it and lifted back the top. "Good Lord, what's this?"

The light from the hall chandelier shone past him into the clay casket, and as he looked into the cavernous container he felt the breath hit hard against his teeth while while a jerking, pounding feeling came into his chest beneath the curve of his left collar-bone. He was looking full into the still calm face of a dead woman.

Carefully, stepping softly with that reverence which is the instinctive due of death, he stood the casket cover in the angle of the wall and looked again into the terra-cotta coffin. If what he saw was death it was a startling counterfeit of life.

She lay as easily and naturally in her clay coffin as though she slept in her accustomed bed. Tall she was and slender, perfectly proportioned as a statue wrought by Phidias or Praxiteles, golden-haired and fair-skinned as a Nordic blonde. From tapering white throat to slender chalk-white ankles she was draped in a white robe, the simple Ionic *chiton* of white linen cut in that austere modest style of ancient Greece in which the upper portion of the dress falls downward again from neck to waist to form a sort of cape, masking the outline of the bosom and leaving the entire arms and points of the shoulders bare. Save for the tiny studs of hand-wrought gold which held the gown together at the shoulders and the narrow double line of horizontal purple stripes at the bottom of the cape her dress was without ornament of any sort. There were no rings upon the long slim fingers of the narrow hands that lay demurely crossed upon her breast,

her narrow, high-arched feet were bare. A corded fillet of white linen bound her bright hair in a Psyche knot.

For a moment—or an hour, he had no way of telling, for time seemed pausing, and breathing with it—he stood looking at the lovely body confined in the baked-clay casket. Like every normal layman he had an inborn horror of death, and instinctively felt frightened in the presence of the dead, but, somehow, this did not seem death.

It was, rather, the image of slumber, of live unconscious, waiting to be waked.

Yet, despite appearances, he knew that she was dead, and had been for a thousand years and more. He had seen coffins like the one she lay in at the museums. Explorers' spades had dug them from the Christian cemetery at Alexandria, relics of the vanished Roman Empire of the East. He recognized her simple, graceful costume, too. The narrow stripes of Tyrian dye that edged her cape bore witness to her status as a freeborn Roman citizen, the corded girdle at her waist proclaimed her a virgin. She must have lived—and died—before the rise of Islam in the Seventh Century.

Yet though she must have passed from life to death twelve hundred and more years ago so perfect was the mimicry of life, so absolute the counterfeit of breathing sleep, that he was afraid to move lest he waken her.

Gradually his reason reasserted itself. The old Egyptians had been skilled embalmers; he'd heard it said they knew a process whereby all appearance of mortality could be removed; not the crude pickling of mummification, but a technique which approached that practiced by embalmers of our day. Yet look as he would he could find no sign of the embalmer's work, no wound, no slit in the smooth skin, no scar or bandage.

Reverently he bent above the dead form in the coffin. Beside the body, almost hidden by a fold of the white robe, he saw a roll of something which appeared like parchment, and bending closer he could make out letters on it. This might give a clue to her identity and explain her marvelous defiance of the natural law of dissolution.

The rolled screeed crackled in his hands. It was not parchment, he discerned, but something thin and almost transparent, like row on row of library mending tissue joined skillfully together. He recognized it, he had seen its like in the museums—papyrus.

The writing on it was in square black letters strung together without break, as if the whole message were one long word. "What language?" he wondered, looking idly at the characters. Egyptian? Not likely, they used picture-writing. Greek? Perhaps, but the letters didn't look like Grecian characters. He ran his eye along the topmost line:

NOVERINTUNIVERSIPERBREVIA.

"Gibberish!" he told himself disgustedly, then checked in mid-breath. No! The characters were Roman capitals, like the numerals on his watch, and suddenly he recalled having heard that it was not until comparatively recent days that words were written separately for convenience in reading.

Here was a clue. He hadn't looked inside a Latin book in almost twenty years, but— Frowning with the effort, he bent his gaze upon the opening letters of the message:

NOV—that might be an abbreviation for *nova*, signifying new, but that would make the next word *erin*. There wasn't any such word he remembered. Still—

Suddenly, as a figure hidden in a picture-puzzle becomes clear when it has been stared at fixedly for a time, the first sixteen letters of the line seemed to separate. There they were, in two words:

NOVERINT — UNIVERSI — Know everyone, know all men—

And the next three characters spelled P-E-R—*per*, meaning by—

Then BREVIA—these writs, these writings—

He was making progress now. It would be a long task, but the thing could be deciphered and translated. Plainly it was in the nature of a legal document, perhaps a statement of the dead girl's name and parentage.

For the first time in more than ten years he smiled with

eyes as well as lips. "I'll know more about you in a little while, my dear," he told her in a whisper. Then, even lower: "Sleep on, and pleasant dreams."

It was almost morning when he leaned back from his desk, utterly worn out with unaccustomed work, but too astounded to be conscious of fatigue. Crumpled paper lay about him on the floor, the ashtray was piled high with cigarette stubs, but on the desk lay his translation completed:

Know all to whom these writings come that I, known to the Greeks as Philamon, but to my fellow-followers of the Old Gods' worship as Harmichis, being of the olden blood of mighty Egypt and a sworn priest of the Old Gods, have caused the virgin Helena to fall into a deep sleep by the arts of my learning, wherefrom she shall not waken till one takes her by the hand and calls her name and bids her rise.

Now to whosoever sees these writings, greetings and admonition: It is my purpose to assume a like sleep unto hers when I have finished preparations for her safekeeping, and for mine own. But haply it may fall out that we wake in divers places, and that another than myself shall summon her from sleep. Now, therefore, stranger, be ye warned. The virgin Helena is mine, and not another's, and should thou come upon her sleeping in her coffin, thou art charged to leave her as thou findest her, for if she waken at thy bidding, and looketh on thee with favor, know that I, Harmichis, servant of the Most High Gods, and a mighty man in combat, will seek thee out and do thee mortal battle for her, and as for her, should she look on another with the eyes of love, then she shall truly die by my hand, and not awaken any more, either at the bidding of a mortal man or otherwise, for bodiless and without hope of resurrection shall she wander in Amenti forever. I have said.

The more he read the document the crazier it sounded, and, paradoxically, the crazier it sounded the more logical

it seemed. His recollection of the history of the Roman Empire of the East was sketchy, but he remembered having heard that the old faith was kept alive by Coptic descendants of the original Egyptians, and that even today there are men who claim to have been initiated into the mysteries of Osiris and the lesser gods of Egypt. It seemed quite possible that this man who called himself Harmichis might have been a member of the old priesthood. There was small doubt that the Egyptian priests understood hypnotism, just as the Hindus did. That would account for the assertion that Harmichis "caused the virgin Helena to fall into a deep sleep by the arts of his learning."

Evidently this had been some sort of ancient version of a lovers' suicide pact. Harmichis, unable to marry the Greek girl, had hypnotized her—put her in a state of suspended animation—coffined her and had her buried in the desert sands. He had then intended to hypnotize himself, or have another do it to him and be buried by her side. Then at some predetermined time he would awaken, issue from his grave and rouse the sleeping maiden. "And just in case somebody beat him to it, he gave 'em timely warning to lay off," Fullerton ended aloud.

He lighted a fresh cigarette and bowed his head in thought. How long had the hypnotic sleep lasted? How long does it take for a hypnotically induced trance to become true death? Obviously she had not wakened in her coffin. There was no sign of a struggle. Quite as obviously she had not died of slow starvation while in a cataleptic state. She was slender, but with the slenderness of youthful grace, not the emaciation of starvation.

He shook his head and rose. If only what old Harmichis had wished were possible—if only he could take her by the hand and call on her to waken—

Once more he stood above the terracotta coffin, looking in the dead girl's calm sweet face. Good Lord, but she was beautiful! Her smoothly-flowing contours melted into lines of perfect symmetry, dark lashes swept the pure curve of her cheeks, her lips, still faintly stained with color, rested softly on each other. Unbidden, a verse from *Romeo and Juliet* came to his mind:

Beauty's ensign yet
Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,
And death's pale flag is not advanced there.

Scarcely realizing what he did he bent down and laid his fingers on one of the slim pale hands resting on the dead girl's breast. He recoiled in surprise. The hand was warm as living flesh, firm and lovely to the touch.

"All right," he murmured argumentatively to himself. "I'm crazy. So what? I'm going to try it, anyway."

How did you say "arise" in Latin? He thought a moment, then, his hand upon the girl's, his lips almost against the little low-set ear that lay framed in a nest of glowing gold-bright curls: "*Serge, O Helena!*" He wasn't quite sure that was right. Perhaps he should have said, "*Serge tu,*" but . . . "*O Helena, sergel!*" he repeated, louder this time.

A chill, not quite of fear nor yet of pure excitement, but rather from a combination of them, rippled through him, for with the repetition of the command the fingers in his stirred, curled up to take a light hold on his hand, and the bosom of the dead girl heaved as if in respiration. The waxen-smooth blue-veined eyelids were lifted slowly from a pair of almost golden eyes, and a faint suggestion of color swept upward through her throat and cheeks like a blush. Her calm lips parted, trembled in a broken little sigh.

She met his startled gaze with a long look of gentle trust. "Is it truly thou, my lord?" she asked in a soft whisper.

He looked down at her raptly, like a worshipper before a shrine, or a child to whom a glimpse of fairyland has been vouchsafed. Involuntarily he leaned toward her. The attraction was instinctive, elemental, unreasoning as the drifting down of autumn leaves which take their flight without consideration or knowledge of the botanical process involved. For a long, heart-stilling moment they looked into each other's eyes, and as he looked at her he felt the shell of rage and hatred for the world and all mankind which he has kept about him for the last ten years

begin to soften like a frozen river in the first spring sunshine.

"Helena!" he breathed almost inaudibly.

Her steadfast eyes were wide, star-bright with tears that came unbidden to their black-lashed lids, and her lips were trembling like an eager child's. "Is it truly thou, my lord?" she asked again.

Hell-broth simmered to a boil in Alexandria. It was the summer of the year 635, and everywhere within the ancient city of the Ptolemies dissention reigned. Fanatic monks and deacons of the orthodox religion mobbed heretics of the old Coptic Church. Copts burned the orthodox churches, and murdered monks and priests at every opportunity. From the ghetto where almost a hundred thousand Jews were barred in by intolerance of Greek and Copt there issued almost nightly raiding parties to avenge the insults heaped upon the Sons of Israel by daylight. The Roman governor hanged and crucified adherents to all parties with a fine impartiality, and confiscated lands and goods with even greater readiness. From the East came ominous reports of Islam's onward march; some said that Amrou, general of the Caliph Omar's Syrian armies, had already laid siege to Pelusium, guardian fortress of the boundary.

In an upper chamber of her father's house in the Museum Street the damsel Helena was seated, reading from a vellum scroll the romance of Hero and Leander. Of late there had been little else that she could do. Most of the city's four hundred theatres were closed by order of the governor, for wherever crowds assembled rioting was sure to follow. The streets and squares re-echoed to the march of mailed *protectorii*—soldiers of the Roman garrison—the baths no longer afforded a comfortable haven for exchange of friendly gossip.

“ . . . yonder shines the blessed light,
Love-kindled to dispel the night
And lead me, Hero mine, to thee,”

she read, her lips half forming the words as her eyes traced down the lines of boldly-formed Greek letters. "Yes, Judith?" she looked up as a small Negro maid paused at the door with a deep bow.

"If it please your ladyship the Copt Philamon waits below, and beg an audience."

Helena's smooth brow wrinkled in a frown. "Bid him begone," she answered. "Tell him I am at the bath, or in the theatre—"

"I have, your ladyship, but still he lingers obstinately, saying he will wait until it pleases you to see him."

"Does he, in very truth? Why, then, 'twere better than I saw him quickly and dispatched the business for all time. Bring him hither, slave."

As the serving wench went on her errand Helena laid by her parchment and glanced toward the door with a small frown of annoyance between her classic level brows. Philamon—she had no wish to see him now or ever, yet for old time's sake she'd try to be as gentle as she might. They had been schoolmates and playfellows, though she was the daughter of a philosopher attached to the Museum and he the son of a rich Coptic merchant. Ostensibly he was a Christian, and bore the Greek name of Philamon, but as he grew from youth to manhood he had joined with others of his race in an attempt to revive worship of the ancient deities of Egypt. Until they had expelled him from the lecture halls of the Museum he had the impudence to preach the godhead of Osiris. Now, grown to man's estate, he presumed to sue for her hand—insolent desert-spawn, to aspire to the hand of one in whose veins ran the noblest blood of the Empire. The tinkling of the small bells on the silken curtain at the door cut short her reverie, and Philamon entered with a deep obeisance.

He was a handsome young man, dark, slender, lithe and almost silent as a snake in his movements. Above a tunic of deep Tyrian purple edged with gold embroidery he wore a light cape of green silk. A jeweled girdle with a dagger hanging from it in a sheath of gem-encrusted leather clasped his waist, buskins of white leather worked with

gold were on his feet. His curling black hair was encircled by a golden fillet.

"*Salve, Helena,*" he greeted, dropping naturally into the classic Latin which, as a Copt, he preferred to the Greek spoken by the ruling class "*Dominus tecum.*"

"Hast thou then become a Christian—again?" she asked with a faint sneer. "I had not thought to hear thee say—"

He cut her short with an impatient gesture. "There is no time to bandy words, my Helena. Knowest thou the latest tidings from the East?"

"What should a Grecian maiden know of them? Am I a Coptic traitor, having secret messages from spies—"

Once more his lifted hand broke through her bitter words. "Pelusium has been taken by Amrou. The path to Alexandria lies open to the hosts of Islam. Within the month the Caliph's soldiers will have ringed the city's walls with steel."

Now genuine alarm showed in her face. "The governor—"

"The governor? *Pah!*" He spat the exclamation out as though it were an epithet. "What can he do? The Roman soldiery is soft with too much wine and food, too little war. The Gothic mercenaries are besotted with their wine and dice and wenches, and would set sail for Europe ere the first assault. There is not a single legion in the field against the hordes of Amrou's Arab cavalry, and every day fresh troops of Saracens come up from Syria. There is no help or hope for it. The Alexandrian garrison is doomed."

"Then—then what shall I do?" she faltered.

He smiled. Not pleasantly. "Hear me, O Helena. Afortime I have offered you my hand, but you have refused—reviled—me. Now once more I make you offer of an honorable marriage and fortune which shall be secure from seizure by the Arabs. They have promised all us Copts immunity if we will join with them against the Greeks. I shall have high place and rank and power in the government of the Caliph. Which will you choose, O Helena, my name and love and fortune, or exile and

poverty at the court of Heraclius? Philosophers are very plentiful in Byzantium. Thy father's learning will command small recompense."

Not for a moment did she doubt him. He was a traitor to the Empire, an apostate Christian, a conspirator, but no liar. In an agony of apprehension her fingers twisted and untwisted themselves. There was about her the appearance of a frightened child. "But I do not love thee, Philamon—"

"No more Philamon; I have done with all things Greek," he interrupted. "Call me by my rightful name, Harmichis."

She went on as if he had not spoken: "To wed a man not loving him—"

Once more he cut her short. "See, Helena, here is a window to the future. Look into it and tell me what thou see'st." From the pocket hanging at his girdle he produced a globe of rock-crystal somewhat larger than an orange and laid it on the table before her. "Look, look into it, my Helena, and see if thou wilt choose to be my mate, or brave the future unprotected!"

Timorously she bent forward, looking into the cool limpid depth of the glass ball. His eyes, hot; greedy, coal-black, were upon her, his sharp-cut lips were whispering insistently, "Look—look! Look through the window of the future, Helena—"

At first she saw no more than vague prismatic mirrorings of the room, such as might have been reflected in a floating soap-bubble, but gradually the crystal clouded; shading from the clarity of water to the opalescence of fresh milk, then darkening steadily, appeared to grow jet-black, as if it were a sphere of polished ebony. A point of light appeared against the brilliant blackness, another, and another.

Now they were whirling round each other, like torches carried by wild-leaping dancers viewed from a tower top at night, and gradually they seemed to form a pattern. In their merging brightness she could decry figures—she saw the wild charge of the Arab cavalry, saw the Imperial legions staggering from the battlefield; beheld the great

siege-engines set up under Alexandria's walls, and saw the Saracens come swarming up the battlements to cut down every living thing that barred their wild, victorious advance.

"Oh—horrible!" she faltered, and tried to wrench her gaze away from the bright sphere, but a power greater than her own will held her fascinated eyes upon it. A light, bright mist, an endless network of converging lines seemed taking form in the crystal. In its depths, as through a dim, wiped-over window, she beheld herself asleep. Asleep? No, never maiden slept in such a bed as that, save in the last long sleep that knows no waking. It was a coffin that she lay in, and they had taken all her jewelry off, slipped the bright emeralds from her ears, drawn the rings from her fingers, even taken off her gold-embroidered sandals. Dead. She, Helena, was dead, and about to be buried like a beggar maid.

But what was this? Above the coffin which enclosed her bent a face. She did not recognize it, for the features differed from the features of the men she knew. It was finely drawn with rather high cheekbones, the mouth was wide and generous, the eyes a pale and smoky gray. Hardened by suffering it was, and scarred by the deep acid-cuts of cynicism, but instinctively she felt drawn to it, for she knew that it belonged to one who had an infinite capacity for love and kindness—and infinite need of them.

"Art thou—art thou to be my lord?" she asked tremulously. "Art thou he into whose hands I shall lay my heart like a gift—"

Harsh and dry and rasping with cold fury Harmichis' voice drowned out her timid question:

"Sleep, Helena. Fall thou in a deep and dreamless sleep which men shall take for death, and wake no more until thy hand be taken and thy name called—"

Four oxen, white and without blemish, drew the funeral car that held Helena's coffin from the Church of Holy Wisdom to the great Necropolis where Christian dead were buried. Two dozen lovely maidens robed in white and veiled with purple walked barefoot in the dust beside

the flower-burdened hearse, with the Patriarch of Alexandria and his train of deacons and subdeacons following in their gilded curricles drawn by white mules. At the grave the girls wailed piercingly and tore their faces with their nails, then cut their long hair off and threw the braided tresses on the coffin. With incense, bell and intoned prayer the churchmen laid her in the grave and went their several ways.

The burying ground lay silent in the fading moonlight. A soft low haze that swept up from the harbor shrouded tree and monument and mausoleum in a silvery unreal half-light as Harmichis and the two stout knaves he had picked up on the waterfront crept silently as wind-blown clouds across the broad lawns of the great Necropolis. "Dig here," Harmichis ordered, and at his command the villains turned the loose turf back.

The ornate coffin, ornamented with a frieze depicting scenes from the life of Saint Helena, lay but a foot or two beneath the sod. In fifteen minutes it was hoisted from the grave, its sealings of lime-mortar broken, and the lovely corpse exposed.

Working quickly, Harmichis undid the emerald rings from Helena's small ears, drew the jeweled rings from her fingers, unclasped the brooch that held the Persian shawl about her shoulders, unlaced the gold-embroidered buskins on her feet. "Take them," he tossed the loot to his helpers. "Their price will buy a jar of wine in any shop along the quay." Then, as the scoundrels pocketed the finery, "Bring on the other coffin."

It was a plain, cheap case of half-baked earthenware they lugged from the cart hitched beside the road, the sort of casket used by those just rich enough to bury their dead chested, but too poor to afford any but the meanest funeral furnishings. Into it they put Helena, then dropped it in the place of her elaborate casket, and heaped the broken earth upon it.

"Break this up and throw the pieces in the harbor," Harmichis ordered as he gave the fine coffin a kick. "Here is the balance of thy hire." He tossed a purse to them and turned away. Chuckling, he murmured to himself, "No

grave robber will seek for buried treasure in that pauper's coffin. Sleep on my Helena; sleep on in blessed poverty until—"

Half an hour later he was in his own bed chamber. His Grecian clothes were laid aside and in their place he wore a gown of plain white linen, such as that the priests vowed to Osiris wore in days before the coming of the Greeks and Romans. Before him on the table lay the crystal ball which he had used to hypnotize the girl.

"Gaze, gaze, Harmichis," he bade himself. "Gaze, servant of the Most High Gods, gaze in the magic crystal, yield up thy being and sink thou in a sleep so deep that men shall take it for death till—" His voice failed slowly, sinking from a murmur to a whisper, finally to silence. His head fell forward on his arms—

The news that Philamon the Copt had died of grief for Helena the Greek girl spread through the city. His funeral was a simple one, for neither Greek nor Coptic priest would say a prayer for one who had admitted publicly he was apostate, a follower of the old gods.

Nevertheless, because he had been rich, and because his will requested it, they dug his grave a little distance from the grave where Helena the Christian maiden had been laid.

"Art thou truly he whom I did see aforetime in the gazing-crystal of the renegade Philamon?" the girl asked Fullerton, her golden eyes fixed questioningly on him.

He was suddenly aware that she did not speak English—but that he understood her perfectly.

"Of—of course, it's I," he answered stammeringly, "but—" in his excitement he let go her hand, and instantly her look of rapt attention changed to one of mild bewilderment. She said something in reply. Her words were musically soft and liquid, but what she said he no more understood than if she'd spoken in Chinese.

"May I help you?" he put out his hand again, and she laid hers in it with the air of a princess bestowing a rare gift. Like a radio dialed suddenly from a foreign to a local broadcast, her words became intelligible in mid-syllable.

“—and Philamon—Harmichis—shall not have me?”

“He certainly shall not,” he answered positively. “Neither he nor anyone, unless you wish—”

He stood away from her as he spoke, and once again he saw the puzzled look come in her eyes. She could not understand a syllable he pronounced.

Then understanding came to him. He could not explain it, but he knew. While they were standing hand in hand, or even when they touched each other lightly, everything one said was perfectly intelligible to the other. The moment they broke contact each was walled off from the other by the barrier of alien speech.

The maid had laid a fire before she left that evening, and in a moment he had kindled it. Then hand in hand they sat before the blazing logs and talked, and understood each other in that mystic communion which seemed to come to them when they made bodily contact. With only a few prompting questions she related her last day in Alexandria, told how Harmichis had bidden her look in the crystal— “The Saracens did not prevail against the soldiers of the Emperor, did they, my lord?” she broke off to ask him tremulously.

He took a deep breath. How could he tell her? But: “More than a thousand years ago, child,” he answered.

“A thousand years—” Her eyes came up to his from under the deep shadow of their curling lashes. “Then I am—”

It was hard for him to explain, but adding what she'd told him to the information gleaned from the papyrus he could piece her history together. When he had done she bent her head in thought a moment. Finally she turned to him, eyes wide, lips parted. Her breath was coming faster. “I mind me that in that far day from which I come men sometimes found the mummies of the ancient ones in the rock tombs,” she whispered.

“They're still doing it,” he answered with a smile. “The mummies of Rameses and Tutankhamen are in museums—”

She nodded understandingly and he saw the pupils of her golden eyes swell and expand, darkening the bright

irises. "To whom do they belong, those bodies salvaged from the past?" she interrupted.

"Why—to whoever finds them, I suppose," he rejoined, a little puzzled by her agitation.

"They are the things and chattels of their finders?" she persisted.

"Yes, I suppose you might say that—"

He stopped in utter surprise, for at his words the girl had slipped down from the couch and fallen to her knees before him. Taking his right hand in both of hers she bowed her head submissively and placed his hand upon it. "Full-ah-thon"—she said his name with difficulty—"behold me, a stranger from another age and place, alone and friendless in a foreign world. Freely, and of mine own will and accord, I give myself into thy ownership, and claim from thee the protection the master owes his slave. Take me, my lord and master; do with me as thou wilt. My life is in thy shadow."

He crushed down a desire to protest, or even show amusement at the drama of her self-surrender. She was a child of ancient days, and slavery was a social institution of her times. "Rise, Helena," he ordered solemnly. "I cannot take thee for my slave—"

Tears started to her lashes and rolled in big, slow drops down her pale cheeks, her lower lip began to tremble as though she were about to cry. "Am I then so favorless in thy sight that thou wilt not have me for thy handmaid, Full-ah-tohn, my lord?" she asked.

"Favorless? Why, child, you're beautiful; you're the loveliest thing I've ever seen—"

She was on the couch beside him now, her little feet tucked under her, one hand in his, the other resting on his arm. "Thou givest me my freedom, lord?" she asked.

"Of course, but—"

"But promise me one thing before I take it," she persisted.

"Why, certainly, if it will make you happier—"

"It will, my lord. 'Twill make me very, very happy. Each day at this same hour promise me thou wilt repeat

those words—tell me that I am fair and lovely in thy sight!”

“You must be famished after your long sleep,” he answered noncommittally. “Wait here, I’ll boil some eggs and make some chocolate.”

He was busy in the kitchen a few minutes, but busy as his hands were he was even busier with his thoughts. Here was a complication. This lovely girl who despite the date of her birth was physically no more than two and twenty had been literally dropped on his doorstep. In all the strange new modern world where fate had put her she knew no one but him; she was as utterly his responsibility as if she were a baby—and she had just demanded that he tell her she was beautiful at half-past three each morning.

A clinking sound as of metal striking stone attracted his attention as he bore the tray of food into the living room. Pausing at the front door, he looked out across the lawn.

Sharply defined in the moonlight, a man was working at the bright tile in his sidewalk, forcing it from its place with a light crowbar. As Fullerton’s gaze fell on him the man paused in his labor and raised his head.

It was his new neighbor, the man before whose house the tile had been set. A shaft of moonlight striking through the unleafed boughs of a tree picked his face out of the shadow as a spotlight shows an actor’s features on a darkened stage. It was a handsome face, with features clear-cut as an image on a coin, high cheekbones, a wide and full-lipped mouth and wide, black restless eyes with drooping lids and haughty, high-arched brows. Now it was convulsed in a frown of hot fury. He glared about him with a look of hatred sharp and pitiless as a bared knife, then once more bent to his labor.

Fullerton stepped quickly from the hall into the firelit sanctuary of the living room. There was a chilly feeling at his spine as he drew the curtains tighter over the windows.

He had, too, a curiously unpleasant feeling in the region of his stomach. Distinctly as if he were hearing them pronounced, he recalled the warning of the papyrus:

“—if she waketh at thy bidding and looketh on thee

with favor, know that I, Harmichis, servant of the Most High Gods of olden Egypt, will do thee battle for her." She had wakened at his bidding—did she look on him with favor? And if she did— He put the thought away deliberately, and placed the eggs and chocolate on the coffee table before her.

Fitting Helena into the modern scene was something of a problem at first. It was impossible to take her shopping in a costume which essentially was like a modern nightrobe, but Fullerton was equal to the emergency. He had her stand on sheets of paper and with a pencil traced the outlines of her feet. With these, and the help of an obliging saleswoman, he bought her a pair of shoes and stockings to accompany them. While she remained indoors enveloped in his bathrobe he took her *chiton* to a shop and bought a dress and cloak from its measurements. Thus clothed she sallied out with him, and for the first time in his life he understood why women love to shop.

The classic vogue in women's styles seemed to have been created for her benefit, she wore the latest modes as if they had been planned for her.

When the fashionable *coiffeur* put his shears to her knee-length hair she cried out as if he had cut her flesh with the keen steel, but when the process was completed and she emerged from the booth with her amber-blond hair waved up from neck and temples and a nest of curls massed high on her head she surveyed her image in the mirror with a gurgle of wide-eyed delight. "I did not think I was so beautiful," she confided to him. "Art sure"—she eyed him archly—"art sure thou wilt not reconsider and hold me to the offer which I made thee on the night thou wakened me?"

"What offer?" he asked, purposely obtuse.

She took his hand in hers and raised it. For the barest fraction of a second his palm brushed the bright curls that clustered like a crown upon her head. "If thou should wish to change thy mind—" she began. Then a salesgirl came with an armful of dresses, and the sudden tenseness which

had gripped his heart as if it were a giant hand relaxed.

It was almost incredible how quickly she learned English, and how readily she fitted into modern life. Eating with a knife and fork at first gave her a little trouble, she was superstitiously afraid of taxicabs and subways at first, and her first trip in an elevator terrified her almost to the point of swooning, but within a month she might have been mistaken for one of the season's crop of *débutantes*.

The change in him was almost noticeable as the transformation in her. The icy shell of rage and hatred which he had worn round him for the past ten years began to melt away as he found new interest in life. They went everywhere—did everything—together. To watch the changes in her face while they were at the opera or the play, to see the smiles break through the statuesque calm of her classic features when he introduced her to a new experience—the movies, a new food, horseback riding, skating on the frozen lake in Prospect Park, skiing in the Adirondacks—these things gave him pleasure of a sort he had not thought to know again. He and Millicent had never had much common interest. To Helena he was the sun around which all the worlds revolved. She looked to him for advice, guidance and protection. The feeling he was indispensable to someone gave him a new grip on life. He went to see his lawyers and had them prepare a petition to restore his civil rights. As soon as he was no longer a legal corpse he would initiate adoption proceedings. Helena—his daughter.

One of his first moves was to give up the house in South Brooklyn and take a new place on the Heights where they could look across the bay at the tall spires of Manhattan, bright with sunlight in the daytime, jewel-dotted with the glow of countless lighted windows after dark.

One April morning he drove through the block where he had lived when Helena was brought to him. His house was still vacant. FOR RENT signs hung in the windows. Three doors farther down the street he stopped his car and looked down at the sidewalk. The bright tile still twinkled amid the gray paving-blocks. "Too bad, old chap," he

chuckled as he set the car in motion, "but there's no use keeping that thing there. Your date with Helena is off. But definitely."

A curtain stirred at a front window as he spoke, and for a second he glimpsed a face peering from the darkened house. It was the same face he had seen in the moonlight the night Helena came to him, but changed. Now it was like a skull that had been lightly fleshed over, a dead-white face with a blue growth of beard on cheek and chin, and narrow, venomous eyes.

Something—some unwonted sound must have awakened him, for he sat abruptly upright in the darkness, ears strained to catch a repetition of the noise. A sense of apprehension lay on him, in his inner ear a tocsin sounded an alarm insistently. Listening in the smothering darkness, he was not certain if he'd heard a sound, or if it were the sudden stopping of a sound that wakened him.

Then through the blackness of the darkened house it came again. A scream, a woman's scream so brief that he could hardly trust the evidence of his ears. A cry of stark and utter terror uncontrolled that stopped almost as quickly as it started, but seemed to leave a tingling echo of shrill horror quivering in the air.

Helena! The cry—if it had been a cry—came from the direction of the front room where she slept.

He fumbled in the darkness for a weapon of some sort. His hands closed on the first thing that they touched, a heavy flask of toilet water, and swinging the stout bottle like a club he ran on tiptoe down the hall.

A little trickle of dim light flowed out into the darkened hall beneath her door—as if someone had spilled a splash of luminance upon her floor and some of it had filtered across the sill.

Breathlessly, he bent his head to listen, laid cautious fingers on the doorknob. Voices, muted to a ghostly murmur, came to him from the room beyond.

"—but that was more than a full thousand years ago, Harmichis—"

A short, dry laugh, as frigid as a breath from an ice-cave, broke through the girl's low pleading. "Know'st not,

my Helena, there be three things which time is powerless to soften, a sword, a diamond and the hatred of a servant of the Olden Gods?"

"Nay, not hatred, surely, good Harmichis. Once thou didst say thou loved me—"

Again the short, sharp, terrifying laugh. "As thou hast said, that was a thousand years ago, O Helena. Think'st thou I put thee in the mystic sleep to save thee harmless from the Saracen invader only to have thee fall into the hands of this outlander? Thou lovest him, dost thou not?"

"Yes, that I do; better than my life or sight or blood or breath, with all my heart and soul and spirit, but—"

"Then make thee ready for the sleep that truly knows no waking, Helena. This time thou'lt have no second chance. No other man shall take thy hand and call thy name and bid thee rise to live and love, for thou'lt be dust. Bare thy white throat to the knife of my vengeance—"

Fullerton drove in the door with a tremendous kick. On the floor beside her bed knelt Helena, her hands upraised to implore mercy from the man who towered over her, winding one hand in her glowing hair and holding a short copper-bladed knife against her throat with the other.

He recognized the intruder, the handsome, dark-skinned face, lean to emaciation, the lips drawn back in a reptilian smile of hatred about to be satiated—Philamon — Harmichis — the Egyptian priest whose love had driven him to hypnotize this girl so that she slept a thousand years, and who had followed her across those years to—

The Egyptian had hurled the girl down to the floor so violently that she lay in semi-consciousness, her hands stretched out before her like a diver's when he strikes the water, and turned on him. His teeth were very white against his swarthy skin, the hatred in his eyes was like a living thing. "Now, outlander!"

"You bet it's now!" Fullerton drew back the heavy bottle. "You're overdue in hell a thousand years—"

The bottle hurtled through the air with devastating force, missed the Egyptian as he dodged with weasel-like agility, smashed with a shattering crash against the wall,

and—he was unarmed as the other advanced slowly, knife upraised.

Fullerton snatched up a slipper-chair and held it like a shield before him. Not a moment too soon, either, for the copper-bladed sacrificial knife, heavy with a grip of gold-encrusted lapis lazuli, came whining at him, struck the chair seat with a vicious *pung*, pierced it almost as if it had been cardboard, and thrust its needle point a full six inches through the fragile wood.

He hurled the chair at his advancing enemy, heard it crash with splintering legs against the wall as the other dropped to one knee, then felt his ankle seized as in a snare as the Egyptian slid across the floor and grasped him in a flying tackle.

They fell together in a thrashing heap, rolled over flailing, gouging, punching, digging at each other's eyes and clutching for each other's throats. Despite his slenderness the Egyptian was slightly heavier, and fought with the wild desperation of a mad man. But the years of heavy labor Fullerton had put in while he served his sentence stood him in good stead now. With a heave he drew the other to him, hugged him as a bear might hug its prey, and rolled until he felt the wiry body under him.

“Now, you damned desert rat—”

He felt a searing pain rake his right forearm, then his left, the coat of his pajamas ripped to tatters, and a line of bright blood marked the rents made in the fabric. From some hidden pocket in the linen smock he wore, Harmichis had jerked out a copper weapon like a set of brass knuckles, but armed with curving razor-bladed claws instead of knobs on its rings.

Now his face was roweled by the tear-talons—he could taste the salty blood upon his tongue, for the blades had cut clear through his cheek—in a moment they would reach his throat, his jugular.

With an effort calling up his final ounce of strength he rose to his knees, tottered to his feet, dragged the other after him, hurled him off with all his force.

“Get up!” His voice was hoarse and croaking in his own ears, choked with blood and all but stifled with the

pounding of his heart. "Get up, you truant from hell's fire, and fight like a man!"

He stumbled toward the Egyptian who lay sprawled on his back, his head bent forward at a seemingly impossible angle, a look of utter, shocked surprise upon his face.

"Get up!" he repeated, seizing the supine man's throat. "Get on your feet and fight, or I'll—"

Then he saw it. From the corner of the Egyptian's mouth a little stream of blood welled, slackening and growing with each failing labored palpitation of his heart.

The fellow lay with his back pressed against the bottom of the broken chair, and the knife—his knife—that had pierced through the flimsy wood had struck deep in his back and pierced his lung when he fell on it.

Fullerton began to laugh. A ghastly laugh that rose and trilled and mounted like a shriek of sheer hysteria. "Caught in his own trap—taken in his own net—killed with his own knife!" he almost screamed, and staggered, sagging to his knees with loss of blood and utter exhaustion.

The sounds of the world were coming back again, but slowly, softly, as from a great distance. He could hear the casual noises of street traffic, the hooting of a taxi's horn, the rumble of a subway train as it slid into Clark Street station; far away the low, melodious belling of a Staten Island ferry's whistle.

Somebody bent above him. Somebody bathed his bleeding lacerated cheeks with sweet cool water, someone cried until her tears fell like a benediction on his upturned face. "O Full-ah-tohn, my lord, my life, my only love!" the syllables were thick with tears, but freighted with a very agony of adoration. "Arise, awake, my breath, my heart, my thrice-beloved—"

"You're asking me to wake—as I did you, my dear?" he answered weakly.

"Oh, yes, beloved, speak and tell me that you will not die—"

"Helena!"

She bent above him tenderly. Her hair was on his

forehead, her breath was cool and sweet against his cheek.

“Yes, Full-ah-tohn?”

“Will you—when I get well—will you marry me? I’m almost old enough to be your father, but—you’ve given me something to live for—you’ve—”

“*Hai!*” Her delighted exclamation interrupted his whisper avowal. “Thou old enough to be my sire, O Full-ah-tohn? Dost thou not realize I am a full thousand years thy elder?”

He was too weak to rise, but with her arm beneath his neck, her hands behind his head to guide it, and her lips to find his, he could kiss her.

And in that kiss there was the lighting of another hearth-fire, the hanging of another crane.