

PART • 1

THE CAMERA flashes blinded him for a moment. If only he could get the photographers away.

But they had been at his side for months now-ever since the first artifacts had been found in these barren hills, south of Cairo. It was as if they too had known. Something about to happen. After all these years, Lawrence Stratford was on to a major find.

And so they were there with the cameras, and the smoking flashes. They almost knocked him off balance as he made his way into the narrow rough-hewn passage towards the letters visible on the half-uncovered marble door.

The twilight seemed to darken suddenly. He could see the letters, but he couldn't make them out.

"Samir," he cried. "I need light."

"Yes, Lawrence." At once the torch exploded behind him, and in a flood of yellow illumination, the slab of stone was wonderfully visible. Yes, hieroglyphs, deeply etched and beautifully gilded, and in Italian marble. He had never seen such a sight.

He felt the hot silky touch of Samir's hand on his as he began to read aloud:

" 'Robbers of the Dead, Look away from this tomb lest you wake its occupant, whose wrath cannot be contained. Ramses the Damned is my name.' "

He glanced at Samir. What could it mean?

"Goon, Lawrence, translate, you are far quicker than I am," Samir said.

" 'Ramses the Damned is my name. Once Ramses the Great of Upper and Lower Egypt; Slayer of the Hittites, Builder of Temples; Beloved of the People; and immortal guardian of the kings and queens of Egypt throughout time. In the year of the death of the Great Queen Cleopatra, as Egypt becomes a Roman province, I commit myself to eternal darkness; beware, all those who would let the rays of the sun pass through this door.' *"

"But it makes no sense," Samir whispered. "Ramses the Great ruled one thousand years before Cleopatra."

"Yet these are nineteenth-dynasty hieroglyphs without question," Lawrence countered. Impatiently, he scratched away at the loose nibble. "'And look, the inscription's repeated-in Latin and in Greek." He paused, then quickly read the last few Latin lines.

" 'Be Warned: I sleep as the earth sleeps beneath the night sky or the winter's snow; and once awakened, I am servant to no man.' "

For a moment Lawrence was speechless, staring at the words he'd read. Only vaguely did he hear Samir:

"I don't like it. Whatever it means, it's a curse."

Reluctantly Lawrence turned and saw that Samir's suspicion had turned to fear.

"The body of Ramses the Great is in the Cairo Museum," Samir said impatiently.

"No," Lawrence answered. He was aware of a chill moving slowly up his neck. "There's a body in the Cairo Museum, but it's not Ramses! Look at the cartouches, the seal! There was no one in the time of Cleopatra who could even write the ancient hieroglyphs. And these are perfect-and done like the Latin and the Greek with infinite care."

Oh, if only Julie were here, Lawrence thought bitterly. His daughter, Julie, was afraid of nothing. She would understand this moment as no one else could.

He almost stumbled as he backed out of the passage, waving the photographers out of his path. Again, the flashes went off around him. Reporters rushed towards the marble door.

"Get the diggers back to work," Lawrence shouted. "I want the passage cleared down to the threshold. I'm going into that tomb tonight."

"Lawrence, take your time with this," Samir cautioned. "There is something here which must not be dismissed."

"Samir, you astonish me," Lawrence answered. "For ten years we've been searching these hills for just such a discovery. And no one's touched that door since it was sealed two thousand years ago."

Almost angrily, he pushed past the reporters who caught up with him now, and tried to block the way. He needed the quiet of his tent until the door was uncovered; he needed his diary, the only proper confidant for the excitement he felt. He was dizzy suddenly from the long day's heat.

"No questions now, ladies and gentlemen," Samir said politely. As he always did, Samir came between Lawrence and the real world.

Lawrence hurried down the uneven path, twisting his ankle a little painfully, yet continuing, his eyes narrow as he looked beyond the flickering torches at the sombre beauty of the lighted tents under the violet evening sky.

Only one thing distracted him before he reached the safety zone of his camp chair and desk: a glimpse of his nephew, Henry, watching idly from a short distance away. Henry, so uncomfortable and out of place in Egypt; looking miserable in his fussy white linen suit. Henry, with the inevitable glass of Scotch in his hand, and the inevitable cheroot on his lip.

Undoubtedly the belly dancer was with him-the woman, Malenka, from Cairo, who gave her British gentleman all the money she made.

Lawrence could never entirely forget about Henry, but having Henry underfoot now was more than he could bear.

In a life well lived, Lawrence counted Henry as his only true disappointment-the nephew who cared for no one and nothing but gaming tables and the bottle; the sole male heir to the Stratford millions who properly couldn't be trusted with a one-pound note.

Sharp pain again as he missed Julie-his beloved daughter, who should have been here with him, and would have been if her young fiance" hadn't persuaded her to stay at home.

Henry had come to Egypt for money. Henry had company papers for Lawrence to sign. And Henry's father, Randolph, had sent him on this grim mission, desperate as always to cover his son's debts.

A fine pair they are, Lawrence thought grimly-the ne'er-do-well and the chairman of the board of Stratford Shipping who clumsily funneled the company's profits into his son's bottomless purse.

But in a very real way Lawrence could forgive his brother, Randolph, anything. Lawrence hadn't merely given the family business to Randolph. He had dumped it on Randolph, along with all its immense pressures and responsibilities, so that he, Lawrence, could spend his remaining years digging among the Egyptian ruins he so loved.

And to be perfectly fair, Randolph had done a tolerable job of running Stratford Shipping. That is, until his son had turned him into an embezzler and a thief. Even now, Randolph would admit everything if confronted. But Lawrence was too purely selfish for that confrontation. He never wanted to leave Egypt again for the stuffy London offices of Stratford Shipping. Not even Julie could persuade him to come home.

And now Henry stood there waiting for his moment. And Lawrence denied him that moment, entering the tent and eagerly pulling his chair up to the desk. He took out a leather-bound diary which he had been saving, perhaps for this discovery. Hastily he wrote what he remembered of the door's inscription and the questions it posed.

"Ramses the Damned." He sat back, looking at the name. And for the first time he felt just a little of the foreboding which had shaken Samir.

What on earth could all this mean?

Half-past midnight. Was he dreaming? The marble door of the tomb had been carefully removed, photographed, and placed on trestles in his tent. And now they were ready to blast their way in. The tomb! His at last.

He nodded to Samir. He felt the ripple of excitement move through the crowd. Flashes went off as he raised his hands to his ears, and then the blast caught them all off guard. He felt it in the pit of his stomach.

No time for that. He had the torch in hand and was going in, though Samir tried once again to stop him.

"Lawrence, there could be booby traps, there could be-"

"Get out of my way."

The dust was making him cough. His eyes were watering.

He thrust the torch through the gaping hole. Walls decorated with hieroglyphs-again, the magnificent nineteenth-dynasty style without question.

At once he stepped inside. How extraordinarily cool it felt; and the smell, what was it, a curious perfume after all these long centuries!

His heart beat too fast. The blood rushed to his face, and he had to cough again, as the press of reporters raised the dust in the passage.

'Keep back!'' he shouted crossly. The flashes were going off all around him again. He could barely see the painted ceiling overhead with its tiny stars.

And there, a long table laden with alabaster jars and boxes. Heaps of rolled papyri. Dear God, all this alone confirmed a momentous discovery.

"But this is no tomb!" he whispered.

There was a writing table, covered with a thin film of dust, looking for all the world as if the scholar had only just left it. An open papyrus lay there, with sharpened pens, an ink bottle. And a goblet.

But the bust, the marble bust-it was unmistakably Graeco-Roman. A woman with her tight wavy hair drawn back beneath a metal band, her drowsy half-lidded eyes seemingly blind, and the name cut into the base:

CLEOPATRA

"Not possible," he heard Samir say. "But look, Lawrence, the mummy case!"

Lawrence had already seen it. He was staring speechless at the thing which lay serenely in the very middle of (his puzzling room, this study, this library, with its stacks of scrolls and its dust-covered writing table.

Once again, Samir ordered the photographers back. The smoking flashes were maddening Lawrence.

"Get out, all of you, get out!" Lawrence said. Grumbling, they retreated out of sight of the door, leaving the two men standing there in stunned silence.

It was Samir who spoke first:

"This is Roman furniture. This is Cleopatra. Look at the coins, Lawrence, on the desk. With her image, and newly minted. Those alone are worth-"

"I know. But there lies an ancient Pharaoh, my friend. Every detail of the case-it's as fine as any ever found in the Valley of the Kings."

"But without a sarcophagus," Samir said. "Why?"

"This is no tomb," Lawrence answered.

"And so the King chose to be buried here!" Samir approached the mummy case, lifting the torch high above the beautifully painted face, with its darkly lined eyes and exquisitely modeled lips.

"I could swear this is the Roman period," he said.

"But the style ..."

"Lawrence, it's too lifelike. It's a Roman artist who has imitated the nineteenth-dynastic style to perfection."

"And how could such a thing happen, my friend?"

"Curses," Samir whispered, as if he had not heard the question. He was staring at the rows of hieroglyphs that circled the painted figure. The Greek lettering appeared lower down, and finally came the Latin.

"Touch not the remains of Ramses the Great" Samir read. "It's the same in all three tongues. Enough to give a sensible man pause."

"Not this sensible man," Lawrence replied. "Get those workers in here to lift this lid at once."

The dust had settled somewhat. The torches, in the old iron sconces on the wall, were sending far too much smoke onto the ceiling, but that he would worry about later.

The thing now was to cut open the bundled human shape, which had been propped against the wall, the thin wooden lid of the mummy case carefully laid upright beside it.

He no longer saw the men and women packed at the entrance, who peered at him and his find in silence.

Slowly, he raised the knife and sliced through the brittle husk of dried linen, which fell open immediately to reveal the tightly wrapped figure beneath.

There was a collective gasp from the reporters. Again and again the flashes popped. Lawrence could feel Samir's silence. Both men stared at the gaunt face beneath its yellowed linen bandages, at the withered arms so serenely laid across the breast.

It seemed one of the photographers was begging to be allowed into the chamber. Samir angrily demanded silence. But of these distractions, Lawrence was only dimly aware.

He gazed calmly at the emaciated form before him, its wrappings the color of darkened desert sand. It seemed he could detect an expression in the shrouded features; he could detect something eloquent of tranquillity in the set of the thin lips.

Every mummy was a mystery. Every desiccated yet preserved form a ghastly image of life in death. It never failed to chill him, to look upon these ancient Egyptian dead. But he felt a strange longing as he looked at this one-this mysterious being who called himself Ramses the Damned, Ramses the Great.

Something warm touched him inside. He drew closer, slashing again at the outer wrapping. Behind him, Samir ordered the photographers out of the passage. There was danger of contamination. Yes, go, all of you, please.

He reached out and touched the mummy suddenly; he touched it reverently with the very tips of his fingers. So curiously resilient! Surely the thick layer of bandages had become soft with time.

Again, he gazed at the narrow face before him, at the rounded lids, and the sombre mouth.

"Julie," he whispered. "Oh, my darling, if only you could see ..."

The Embassy Ball. Same old faces; same old orchestra, same old sweet yet droning waltz. The lights were a glare to Elliott Savarell: the champagne left a sour taste in his mouth. Nevertheless he drained the glass rather gracelessly and caught the eye of a passing waiter. Yes, another. And another. Would that it were good brandy or whisky.

But they wanted him here, didn't they? Wouldn't be the same without the Earl of Rutherford. The Earl of Rutherford was an essential ingredient, as were the lavish flower arrangements, the thousands upon thousands of candles; the caviar, and the silver; and the old musicians sawing wearily at their violins while the younger generation danced.

Everyone had a greeting for the Earl of Rutherford. Everyone wanted the Earl of Rutherford to attend a daughter's wedding, or an afternoon tea, or another ball such as this. Never mind that Elliott and his wife rarely entertained anymore in either their London town house or the country estate in Yorkshire-that Edith spent much of her time in Paris now with a widowed sister. The seventeenth Earl

of Rutherford was the genuine article. The titles in his family went back-one way or another-to Henry VIII.

Why hadn't he ruined everything long ago? Elliott wondered. How had he ever managed to charm so many people in whom he had no more than a passing interest, at best?

But no, that wasn't the entire truth. He loved some of these people, whether he cared to admit it or not. He loved his old friend Randolph Stratford, just as he loved Randolph's brother, Lawrence. And surely he loved Julie Stratford, and he loved watching her dance with his son. Elliott was here on account of his son. Of course Julie wasn't really going to marry Alex. At least not any time soon. But it was the only clear hope on the horizon that Alex might acquire the money he needed to maintain the landed estates he would inherit, the wealth that was supposed to go along with an old title, and seldom did anymore.

The sad part was that Alex loved Julie. The money meant nothing to either of them, really. It was the older generation that did the scheming, and the planning, as they have always done.

Elliott leaned against the gilded railing, gazing down at the soft drift of young couples turning beneath him, and for a moment, he tried to shut out the din of voices, and hear only the sweet strains of the waltz.

But Randolph Stratford was talking again. Randolph was assuring Elliott that Julie needed only a little prodding. If only Lawrence would say the word, his daughter would give in.

"Give Henry a chance," Randolph said again. "He's only been in Egypt a week. If Lawrence will take the initiative ..."

"But why," Elliott asked, "should Lawrence do that?"

Silence.

Elliott knew Lawrence better than Randolph knew him. Elliott and Lawrence. No one really knew the whole story, except the two men themselves. At Oxford years ago, in a carefree world, they had been lovers, and the year after they'd finished, they had spent a winter together south of Cairo in a houseboat on the Nile. Inevitably the world had separated them. Elliott had married Edith Christian, an American heiress. Lawrence had built Stratford Shipping into an empire.

But their friendship had never faltered. They had spent countless holidays in Egypt together. They could still argue all night long about history, ruins, archaeological discoveries, poetry, what have you. Elliott had been the only one who really understood when Lawrence retired and went to Egypt. Elliott had envied Lawrence. And there had been the first bitterness between them. In the small hours, when the wine flowed, Lawrence had called Elliott a coward, for spending his remaining years in London in a world he did not value; a world which gave him no joy. Elliott had criticized Lawrence for being blind and stupid. After all, Lawrence was rich beyond Elliott's wildest dreams; and Lawrence was a widower with a clever and independent daughter. Elliott had a wife and son who needed him day in and day out to regulate the successes of their wholly respectable and conventional lives.

"All I mean to say," Randolph pressed, "is that if Lawrence would express his wish about this marriage ..."

"And the small matter of the twenty thousand pounds?" Elliott asked suddenly. The tone was soft, polite, but the question was unforgivably rude. Nevertheless

he persisted. "Edith will be back from France in a week and she's certain to notice that the necklace is missing. You know, she always does."

Randolph didn't answer.

Elliott laughed softly, but not at Randolph, not even at himself. And certainly not at Edith, who had only a little more money now than Elliott did and most of it in plate and jewels.

Perhaps Elliott laughed because the music made him giddy; or something about the vision of Julie Stratford, dancing down there with Alex, touched his heart. Or perhaps because of late he had lost the ability to speak any longer in euphemisms and half-truths. It was gone along with his physical stamina, and the sense of well-being he had enjoyed throughout his youth.

Now his joints hurt more and more with every passing winter; and he could not walk half a mile any longer in the country without suffering a severe pain in his chest. He did not mind having white hair at fifty-five, perhaps because he knew he looked rather good with it. But it bruised him secretly and deeply to have to use a cane wherever he went. These were all mere shadows, however, of what was yet to come.

Old age, weakness, dependence. Pray that Alex was happily married to the Stratford millions, and not before too long!

He felt restless, suddenly; dissatisfied. The soft swooshing music annoyed him; sick to death of Strauss, actually. But it was something keener.

He wanted to explain it suddenly to Randolph, that he, Elliott, had made some crucial mistake a long time ago. Something to do with those long nights in Egypt, when he and Lawrence would walk through the black streets of Cairo together, or rail at each other drunkenly in the little saloon of the boat. Lawrence had somehow managed to live his life along heroic proportions; he had accomplished things of which others were simply incapable. Elliott had moved with the current. Lawrence had escaped to Egypt, back to the desert, the temples, to those clear star-filled nights.

God, how he missed Lawrence. In the last three years they had exchanged only a handful of letters, but the old understanding would never grow dim.

"Henry took some papers with him," Randolph said, "small matter of family stock." He glanced about warily, too warily. Elliott was going to laugh again.

"If it goes as I hope," Randolph continued, "I'll pay you everything I owe you, and the marriage will take place within six months, I give you my word." Elliott smiled.

"Randolph, the marriage may or may not happen; it may or may not solve things for both of us-" "Don't say that, old boy."

"But I must have that twenty thousand pounds before Edith comes home,"

"Precisely, Elliott, precisely."

"You know, you might say no to your son once in a while." A deep sigh came from Randolph. Elliott didn't press it. He knew as well as anyone did that Henry's deterioration was no joke any longer; it had nothing to do with sowing wild oats, or going through a rough period. There was something thoroughly rotten in Henry Stratford and there always had been. There was very little that was rotten in Randolph. And so it was a tragedy; and Elliott, who loved his own son, Alex, excessively, had only sympathy for Randolph on that score.

More assurances; a positive din of assurance. You'll get your twenty thousand pounds. But Elliott wasn't listening. He was watching the dancers again-his good and gentle son whispering passionately to Julie, whose face wore that look of determination that flattered her for reasons that Elliott could never fully understand.

Some women must smile to be beautiful. Some women must weep. But with Julie, the real radiance shone only when she was serious-perhaps because her eyes were too softly brown otherwise, her mouth too guileless, her porcelain cheeks too smooth.

Fired with determination, she was a vision. And Alex, for all his breeding, and all his proffered passion, seemed no more than "a partner" for her; one of a thousand elegant young men who might have guided her across the marble floor.

It was the "Morning Papers Waltz" and Julie loved it; she had always loved it. There came back to her now a faint memory of dancing once to the "Morning Papers Waltz" with her father. Was it when they had first brought home the gramophone, and they had danced all through the Egyptian room and the library and the drawing rooms-she and Father-until the light came through the shutters, and he had said:

"Oh, my dear, no more. No more."

Now the music made her drowsy and almost sad. And Alex kept talking to her, telling her in one way or another that he loved her, and there was that panic inside her, that fear of speaking harsh or cold words.

"And if you want to live in Egypt," Alex said breathlessly, "and dig for mummies with your father, well then, we'll go to Egypt. We'll go straight after the wedding. And if you want to inarch for the vote, well then, I shall march at your side."

"Oh, yes," Julie answered, "that's what you say now, and I know you mean it with all your heart, but Alex, I'm just not ready. I cannot."

She couldn't bear to see him so deadly earnest. She couldn't bear to see him hurt. If only there were a little wickedness in Alex; just a little bit of meanness as there was in everyone else. His good looks would have been improved by a little meanness. Tall, lean and brown-haired, he was too angelic. His quick dark eyes revealed his entire soul too easily. At twenty-five, he was an eager and innocent boy.

"What do you want with a suffragette for a wife?" she asked. "With an explorer? You know I could very well be an explorer, or an archaeologist. I wish I was in Egypt with Father right now."

"Dearest, we'll go there. Only marry me before we go."

He leaned forward as if he meant to kiss her. And she moved back a step, the waltz carrying them almost recklessly fast, so that for a moment she felt light-headed and almost as if she were truly in love.

"What can I do to win you, Julie?" he whispered in her ear. "I'll bring the Great Pyramids to London."

"Alex, you won me a long time ago," she said, smiling. But that was a lie, wasn't it? There was something truly terrible about this moment-about the music with its lovely compelling rhythm, and the desperate look on Alex's face.

"The simple truth is ... I don't want to be married. Not yet." And perhaps not at all?

He didn't answer her. She'd been too blunt, too much to the point. She knew that sudden shrinking. It wasn't unmanly; on the contrary, it was gentlemanly. She had hurt him, and when he smiled again now, there was a sweetness and a courage in it that touched her and made her feel all the more sad.

"Father will be back in a few months, Alex. We'll all talk then. Marriage, the future, the rights of women, married and unmarried, and the possibility that you deserve far better than a modern woman like me who's very likely to turn your hair grey within the first year and send you running into the arms of an old-fashioned mistress."

"Oh, how you love to be shocking," he said. "And I love to be shocked."

"But do you, dearest, really love to be shocked?"

Suddenly he did kiss her. They had stopped in the middle of the dance floor, other couples swirling around them as the music swept on. He kissed her and she allowed it, yielding to him completely as if she must somehow love him; must somehow meet him halfway.

It didn't matter that others must be looking at them. It didn't matter that his hands were trembling as he held her.

What mattered was that, though she loved him terribly, it was not enough.

It was cool now. There was noise out there; cars arriving. The braying of a donkey; and the sharp high-pitched sound of a woman laughing, an American woman, who had driven all the way from Cairo as soon as she had heard.

Lawrence and Samir sat together in their camp chairs at the ancient writing table, with the papyri spread out before them.

Careful not to put his full weight on the fragile piece of furniture, Lawrence hastily scribbled his translations in his leather-bound book.

Now and then he glanced over his shoulder at the mummy, the great King who for all die world looked as if he merely slept. Ramses the Immortal! The very idea inflamed Lawrence. He knew that he would be in this strange chamber until well after dawn.

"But it must be a hoax," Samir said. "Ramses the Great guarding the royal families of Egypt for a thousand years. The lover of Cleopatra?'"

"Ah, but it makes sublime sense!" Lawrence replied. He set down the pen for a moment, staring at the papyri. How his eyes ached. "If any woman could have driven an immortal man to entomb himself, Cleopatra would be that woman."

He looked at the marble bust before him. Lovingly he stroked Cleopatra's smooth white cheek. Yes, Lawrence could believe it. Cleopatra, beloved of Julius Caesar and beloved of Mark Antony; Cleopatra, who had held out against the Roman conquest of Egypt far longer than anyone dreamed possible; Cleopatra, the last ruler of Egypt in the ancient world. But the story-he must resume his translation. . . .

Samir rose and stretched uneasily. Lawrence watched him move towards the mummy. What was he doing? Examining the wrappings over the fingers, examining the brilliant scarab ring so clearly visible on the right hand? Now that was a nineteenth-dynasty treasure, no one could deny it, Lawrence thought.

Lawrence closed his eyes and massaged his eyelids gently. Then he opened them, focusing on the papyrus before him again.

"Samir, I tell you, the fellow is convincing me. Such a command of languages would dazzle anyone. And his philosophical perspective is quite as modern as my own." He reached for the older document, which he had examined earlier. "And this, Samir, I want you to examine it. This is none other than a letter from Cleopatra to Ramses."

"A hoax, Lawrence. Some sort of little Roman joke."

"No, my friend, nothing of the kind. She wrote this letter from Rome when Caesar was assassinated! She told Ramses she was coming home to him, and to Egypt."

He laid the letter aside. When Samir had time he would see for himself what these documents contained. All the world would see. He turned back to the original papyrus.

"But listen to this, Samir-Ramses' last thoughts: 'The Romans can not be condemned for the conquest of Egypt; we were conquered by time itself in the end. And all the wonders of this brave new century should draw me from my grief and yet I can not heal my heart; and so the mind suffers; the mind closes as if it were a flower without sun.' "

Samir was still looking at the mummy, looking at the ring. "Another reference to the sun. Again and again the sun." He turned to Lawrence. "But surely you don't believe it-!"

"Samir, if you can believe in the curse, why can't you believe in an immortal man?"

"Lawrence, you play with me. I have seen the workings of many a curse, my friend. But an immortal man who lived in Athens under Pericles and Rome under the Republic and Carthage under Hannibal? A man who taught Cleopatra the history of Egypt? Of this I know nothing at all."

' "Listen again, Samir: 'Her beauty shall forever haunt me; as well as her courage and her frivolity; her passion for life, which seemed inhuman in its intensity while being only human after all.' "

Samir made no answer. His eyes were fixed on the mummy again, as if he could not stop looking at it. Lawrence understood perfectly, which is why he sat with his back to the thing in order to read the papyrus, so that he would get the crucial work done.

"Lawrence, this mummy is as dead as any I have ever seen in the Cairo Museum. A storyteller, that is what the man was. Yet these rings."

"Yes, my friend, I observed it very carefully earlier; it is the cartouche of Ramses the Great, and so we have not merely a storyteller but a collector of antiquities. Is that what you want me to believe?"

But what did Lawrence believe? He sat back against the sagging canvas of the camp chair and let his eyes drift over the contents of this strange room. Then again he translated from the scroll.

" 'And so I retreat to this isolated chamber; and now my library shall become my tomb. My servants shall anoint my body and wrap it in fine funerary linen as was the custom of my time now so long forgotten. But no knife shall touch me. No embalmer shall extract the heart and brain from my immortal form.* "

A euphoria overcame Lawrence suddenly; or was it a state of waking dream? This voice-it seemed so real to him; he felt the personality, as one never did with the ancient Egyptians. Ah, but of course, this was an immortal man. . . .

Elliott was getting drunk, but no one knew it. Except Elliott, who leaned on the gilded rail of the half-landing again in a rather casual manner that he almost never assumed. There was a style to even his smallest gestures, and now he carelessly violated it, keenly aware that no one would notice; no one would take offense.

Ah, such a world, made up almost wholly of subtleties. What a horror. And he must think of this marriage; he must talk of this marriage; he must do something about the sad spectacle of his son, quite obviously defeated, who, after watching Julie dance with another, came now up the marble stairs.

"I'm asking you to trust in me," Randolph was saying. "I guarantee this marriage. All it takes is a little time."

"Surely you don't think I enjoy pressing you," Elliott answered. Thick-tongued. Drunk all right. "I'm much more comfortable in a dream world, Randolph, where money simply doesn't exist. But the fact is, we cannot afford such reverie, either of us. This marriage is essential for us both."

"Then I shall go to see Lawrence myself."

Elliott turned to see his son only a few steps away, waiting like a schoolboy for the adults to acknowledge him.

"Father, I badly need consolation," Alex said.

"What you need is courage, young man," Randolph said crossly. "Don't tell me you've taken no for an answer again."

Alex took a glass of champagne from the passing waiter.

"She loves me. She loves me not," he said softly. "The simple fact is I cannot live without her. She's driving me mad."

"Of course you cannot." Elliott laughed gently. "Now, look. That clumsy young man down there is stepping on her feet. I'm sure she'd be very grateful if you came to her rescue at once."

Alex nodded, scarcely noticing as his father took the half-full glass from him and drank down the champagne. He straightened his shoulders and headed back to the dance floor. Such a perfect picture.

' 'The puzzling part is this,' Randolph said under his breath. "She loves him. She always has."

"Yes, but she's like her father. She loves her freedom. And frankly I don't blame her. In a way she's too much for Alex. But he'd make her happy, I know that he would."

"Of course."

"And she would make him supremely happy; and perhaps no one else ever will."

"Nonsense," Randolph said. "Any young woman in London would give her eyeteeth for the chance to make Alex happy. The eighteenth Earl of Rutherford? "

"Is that really so important? Our titles, our money, the endless maintenance of our decorative and tiresome little world?" Elliott glanced around the ballroom. This was that lucid and dangerous state with drinking, when everything began to shimmer; when there was meaning in the grain of the marble; when one could make the most offensive speeches. "I wonder sometimes if I should be in Egypt with Lawrence. And if Alex shouldn't peddle his beloved title to someone else."

He could see the panic in Randolph's eyes. Dear God, what did the title mean to these merchant princes, these businessmen who had all but the title? It wasn't only that Alex might eventually control Julie, and thereby control the Stratford millions, and that Alex himself would be far easier than Julie to control. It was the prospect of true nobility, of nieces and nephews roaming the park of the old Rutherford estate in Yorkshire, of that miserable Henry Stratford trading on the alliance in every despicable way that he could.

"We're not defeated yet, Elliott," Randolph said. "And I rather like your decorative and tiresome little world. What else is there when you get right down to it?"

Elliott smiled. One more mouthful of champagne and he must tell Randolph what else there was. He just might. . . .

"I love you, fine English," Malenka said to him. She kissed him, then helped him with his tie, the soft touch of her fingers against his chin making the hairs rise on his neck.

What lovely fools women were, Henry Stratford thought. But this Egyptian woman he had enjoyed more than most. She was dark-skinned, a dancer by profession—a quiet and luscious beauty with whom he could do exactly what he wanted. You never knew that kind of freedom with an English whore.

He could see himself settling someday in an Eastern country with such a woman—free of all British respectability. That is, after he had made his fortune at the tables—that one great win he needed to put him quite beyond the world's reach.

For the moment, there was work to be done. The crowd around the tomb had doubled in size since last evening. And the trick was to reach his uncle Lawrence before the man was swept up utterly by the museum people and the authorities—to reach him now when he just might agree to anything in return for being left alone.

'Go on, dearest.' He kissed Malenka again and watched her wrap the dark cloak about herself and hurry to the waiting car. How grateful she was for these small Western luxuries. Yes, that kind of woman. Rather than Daisy, his London mistress, a spoilt and demanding creature who nevertheless excited him, perhaps because she was so difficult to please.

He took one last swallow of Scotch, picked up his leather briefcase, and left the tent.

The crowds were ghastly. All night long he'd been awakened by the grind and huff of automobiles, and frenzied voices. And now the heat was rising; and he could already feel sand inside his shoes.

How he loathed Egypt. How he loathed these desert camps and the filthy camel-riding Arabs, and the lazy dirty servants. How he loathed his uncle's entire world.

And there was Samir, that insolent, irritating assistant who fancied himself Lawrence's social equal, trying to quiet the foolish reporters. Could this really be the tomb of Ramses II? Would Lawrence grant an interview?

Henry didn't give a damn. He pushed past the men who were guarding the entrance to the tomb.

"Mr. Stratford, please," Samir called after him. A lady reporter was on his heels. "Let your uncle alone now," Samir said as he drew closer. "Let him savor his find."

"The hell I will."

He glared at the guard who blocked his path. The man moved. Samir turned back to hold off the reporters. Who was going into the tomb? they wanted to know.

"This is a family matter," he said quickly and coldly to the woman reporter trying to follow him. The guard stepped in her path.

So little time left. Lawrence stopped writing, wiped his brow carefully, folded his handkerchief and made one more brief note:

"Brilliant to hide the elixir in a wilderness of poisons. What safer place for a potion that confers immortality than among potions that bring death. And to think they were her poisons- those which Cleopatra tested before deciding to use the venom of the asp to take her life.'"

He stopped, wiped his brow again. Already so hot in here.

And within a few short hours, they'd be upon him, demanding that he leave the tomb for the museum officials. Oh, if only he had made this discovery without the museum. God knows, he hadn't needed them. And they would take it all out of his hands.

The sun came in fine shafts through the rough-cut doorway. It struck the alabaster jars in front of him, and it seemed he heard something-faint, like a whispered breath.

He turned and looked at the mummy, at the features clearly molded beneath the tight wrappings. The man who claimed to be Ramses had been tall, and perhaps robust.

Not an old man, like the creature lying in the Cairo Museum. But then this Ramses claimed that he had never grown old. He was immortal, and merely slept within these bandages. Nothing could kill him, not even the poisons in this room, which he had tried in quantity, when grief for Cleopatra had left him half-mad. On his orders, his servants had wrapped his unconscious body; they had buried him alive, in the coffin he had had prepared for himself, supervising every detail; then they had sealed the tomb with the door that he himself had inscribed.

But what had rendered him unconscious? That was the mystery. Ah, what a delicious story. And what if-?

He found himself staring at the grim creature in its bindings of yellow linen. Did he really believe that something was alive there? Something that could move and speak?

It made Lawrence smile.

He turned back to the jars on the desk. The sun was making the little room an inferno. Taking his handkerchief, he carefully lifted the lid of the first jar before him. Smell of bitter almonds. Something as deadly as cyanide.

And the immortal Ramses claimed to have ingested half the contents of the jar in seeking to end his cursed life.

What if there were an immortal being under those wrappings ?

There came that sound again. What was it? Not a rustling; no, nothing so distinct. Rather like an intake of breath.

Once again he looked at the mummy. The sun was shining full on it in long, beautiful dusty rays-the sun that shone through church windows, or through the branches of old oaks in dim forest glens.

It seemed he could see the dust rising from the ancient figure: a pale gold mist of moving particles. Ah, he was too tired!

And the thing, it did not seem so withered any longer; rather it had taken on the contour of a man.

"But what were you really, my ancient friend?" Lawrence asked softly. "Mad? Deluded? Or just what you claim to be- Ramses the Great?"

It gave him a chill to say it-what the French call a frisson. He rose and drew closer to the mummy.

The rays of the sun were positively bathing the thing. For the first time he noticed the contours of its eyebrows beneath the wrappings; there seemed more expression-hard, determined- to its face.

Lawrence smiled. He spoke to it in Latin, piecing together his sentences carefully. "Do you know how long you've slumbered, immortal Pharaoh? You who claimed to have lived one thousand years?"

Was he murdering the ancient language? He had spent so many years translating hieroglyphs that he was rusty with Caesar's tongue. "It's been twice that long, Ramses, since you sealed yourself in this chamber; since Cleopatra put the poisonous snake to her breast."

He stared at the figure, silent for a moment. Was there a mummy that did not arouse in one some deep, cold fear of death? You could believe life lingered there somehow; that the soul was trapped in the wrappings and could only be freed if the thing were destroyed.

Without thinking he spoke now in English.

"Oh, if only you were immortal. If only you could open your eyes on this modern world. And if only I didn't have to wait for permission to remove those miserable bandages, to look on ... your face!"

The face. Had something changed in the face? No; it was only the full sunlight, wasn't it? But the face did seem fuller. Reverently, Lawrence reached out to touch it but then didn't, his hand poised there motionless.

He spoke in Latin again. "It's the year 1914, my great King. And the name Ramses the Great is still known to all the world; and so is the name of your last Queen."

Suddenly there was a noise behind him. Henry:

"Speaking to Ramses the Great in Latin, Uncle? Maybe the curse is already working on your brain."

"Oh, he understands Latin," Lawrence answered, still staring at the mummy. "Don't you, Ramses? And Greek also. And Persian and Etruscan, and tongues the world has forgotten. Who knows? Perhaps you knew the tongues of the ancient northern barbarians which became our own English centuries ago." Once again, he lapsed into Latin. "But oh, there are so many wonders in the world now, great Pharaoh. There are so many things I could show you. . . ."

"I don't think he can hear you, Uncle," Henry said coldly. There was a soft chink of glass touching glass. "Let's hope not, in any case."

Lawrence turned around sharply. Henry, a briefcase tucked under his left arm, held the lid of one of the jars in his right hand.

"Don't touch that!" Lawrence said crossly. "It's poison, you imbecile. They're all full of poisons. One pinch and you'll be as dead as he is. That is, if he's truly dead." Even the sight of his nephew made him angry. And at a time such as this. . . .

Lawrence turned back to the mummy. Why, even the hands seemed fuller. And one of the rings had almost broken through the wrapping. Only hours ago. . . .

"Poisons?" Henry asked behind him.

"It's a veritable laboratory of poisons," Lawrence answered. "The very poisons Cleopatra tried, before her suicide, upon her helpless slaves!" But why waste this precious information on Henry?

"How incredibly quaint," his nephew answered. Cynical, sarcastic. "I thought she was bitten by an asp."

"You're an idiot, Henry. You know less history than an Egyptian camel driver. Cleopatra tried a hundred poisons before she settled on the snake."

He turned and watched coldly as his nephew touched the marble bust of Cleopatra, his fingers passing roughly over the nose, the eyes.

"Well, I fancy this is worth a small fortune, anyway. And these coins. You aren't going to give these things to the British Museum, are you?"

Lawrence sat down in the camp chair. He dipped the pen. Where had he stopped in his translation? Impossible to concentrate with these distractions.

' 'Is money all you think about?' ' he asked coldly. ' 'And what have you ever done with it but gamble it away?' He looked up at his nephew. When had the youthful fire died in that handsome face? When had arrogance hardened it, and aged it; and made it so deadly dull? "The more I give you, the more you lose at the tables. Go back to London, for the love of heaven. Go back to your mistress and your music hall cronies. But get out."

There was a sharp noise from outside-another motor car backfiring as it ground its way up the sandy road. A dark-faced servant in soiled clothes entered suddenly, with a full breakfast tray in his hands. Samir came behind him.

"I cannot hold them back much longer, Lawrence," Samir said. With a small graceful gesture, he bid the servant set down the breakfast on the edge of the portable desk. "The men from the British embassy are here also, Lawrence. So is every reporter from Alexandria to Cairo. It is quite a circus out there, I fear."

Lawrence stared at the silver dishes, the china cups. He wanted nothing now but to be alone with his treasures.

"Oh, just keep them out as long as you can, Samir. Give me a few more hours alone with these scrolls. Samir, the story is so sad, so poignant."

"I'll do my best," Samir answered. "But do take breakfast, Lawrence. You're exhausted. You need nourishment and rest."

"Samir, I've never been better. Keep them out of here till noon. Oh, and take Henry with you. Henry, go with Samir. He'll see that you have something to eat."

"Yes, do come with me, sir, please," Samir said quickly.

"I have to speak to my uncle alone."

Lawrence looked back at his notebook. And the scroll opened above it. Yes, the King had been talking of his grief after, that he had retreated here to a secret study far away from Cleopatra's mausoleum in Alexandria, far away from the Valley of the Kings.

"Uncle," Henry said frostily, "I'd be more than happy to go back to London if you would only take a moment to sign ..."

Lawrence refused to look up from the papyrus. Maybe there would be some clue as to where Cleopatra's mausoleum had once stood.

' ' How many times must I say it?' ' he murmured indifferently. "No. I will sign no papers. Now take your briefcase with you and get out of my sight."

"Uncle, the Earl wants an answer regarding Julie and Alex. He won't wait forever. And as for these papers, it's only a matter of a few shares."

The Earl . . . Alex and Julie. It was monstrous. "Good God, at a time like this!"

' 'Uncle, the world hasn't stopped turning on account of your discovery." Such acid in the tone. "And the stock has to be liquidated."

Lawrence laid down die pen. "No, it doesn't," he said, eyeing Henry coldly. ' 'And as for the marriage, it can wait forever. Or until Julie decides for herself. Go home and tell that to my good friend the Earl of Rutherford! And tell your father I will liquidate no further family stock. Now leave me alone."

Henry didn't move. He shifted the briefcase uneasily, his face tightening as he stared down at his uncle.

"Uncle, you don't realize-

"Allow me to tell you what I do realize," Lawrence said, "that you have gambled away a king's ransom and that your father will go to any lengths to cover your debts. Even Cleopatra and her drunken lover Mark Antony could not have squandered the fortune that has slipped dirough your hands. And what does Julie need with the Rutherford title anyway? Alex needs the Stratford millions, that's the truth of it. Alex is a beggar with a title the same as Elliott. God forgive me. It's the truth."

"Uncle, Alex could buy any heiress in London with tiiat title."

"Then why doesn't he?"

"One word from you and Julie would make up her mind-

"And Elliott would show his gratitude to you for arranging things, is that it? And with my daughter's money he'd be very generous indeed."

Henry was white with anger.

"What the hell do you care about this marriage?" Lawrence asked bitterly. "You humiliate yourself because you need the money. ..."

He thought he saw his nephew's lips move in a curse.

He turned back to the mummy, trying to shut it all out—the tentacles of the London life he'd left behind trying to reach him here.

Why, the whole figure looked fuller! And the ring, it was plainly visible now as if the finger, fleshing out, had burst the wrappings altogether. Lawrence fancied he could see the faint color of healthy flesh.

"You're losing your mind," he whispered to himself. And that sound, there it was again. He tried to listen for it; but his concentration only made him all the more conscious of the noise outside. He drew closer to the body in the coffin. Good Lord, was that hair he saw beneath the wrappings about the head?

"I feel so sorry for you, Henry," he whispered suddenly. "That you can't savour such a discovery. This ancient King, this mystery." Who said that he couldn't touch the remains? Just move perhaps an inch of the rotted linen?

He drew out his penknife and held it uncertainly. Twenty years ago he might have cut the thing open. There wouldn't have been any busybody officials to deal with. He might have seen for himself if under all that dust—

"I wouldn't do that if I were you, Uncle," Henry interrupted. "The museum people in London will raise the roof."

"I told you to get out."

He heard Henry pour a cup of coffee as if he had all the time in the world. The aroma filled the close little chamber.

Lawrence backed into the camp chair, and again pressed his folded handkerchief to his brow. Twenty-four hours now without sleep. Maybe he should rest.

"Drink your coffee, Uncle Lawrence," Henry said to him. "I poured it for you." And there it was, the full cup. "They're waiting for you out there. You're exhausted."

"You bloody fool," Lawrence whispered. "I wish you'd go away."

Henry set the cup before him, right by the notebook.

"Careful, that papyrus is priceless."

The coffee did look inviting, even if Henry was pushing it at him. He lifted the cup, took a deep swallow, and closed his eyes.

What had he just seen as he put down the cup? The mummy stirring in the sunlight? Impossible. Suddenly a burning sensation in his throat blotted out everything else. It was as if his throat were closing! He couldn't breathe or speak.

He tried to rise; he was staring at Henry; and suddenly he caught the smell coming from the cup still in his trembling hand. Bitter almonds. It was the

poison. The cup was falling; dimly he heard it shatter as it hit the stone floor.

"For the love of God! You bastard!" He was falling; his hands out towards his nephew, who stood white-faced and grim, staring coldly at him as if this catastrophe were not happening; as if he were not dying.

His body convulsed. Violently, he turned away. The last thing he saw as he fell was the mummy in the dazzling sunlight; the last thing he felt was the sandy floor beneath his burning face.

For a long moment Henry Stratford did not move. He stared down at the body of his uncle as if he did not quite believe what he saw. Someone else had done this. Someone else had broken through the thick membrane of frustration and put this horrid plot into motion. Someone else had put the silver coffee spoon into the jar of ancient poison and slipped that poison into Lawrence's cup.

Nothing moved in the dusty sunlight. The tiniest particles seemed suspended in the hot air. Only a faint sound originated within the chamber; something like the beat of a heart.

Imaginings. It was imperative to follow through. It was imperative to stop his hand from shaking; to prevent the scream from ever leaving his lips. Because it was there all right—a scream which once released would never stop.

I killed him. I poisoned him.

And now that great hideous and immovable obstacle to my plan is no more.

Bend down; feel the vein. Yes, he's dead. Quite dead.

Henry straightened, fighting a sudden wave of nausea, and quickly took several papers from his briefcase. He dipped his uncle's pen and wrote the name Lawrence Stratford neatly and quickly, as he had done several times on less important papers in the past.

His hand shook badly, but so much the better. For his uncle had had just such a tremor. And the scribble looked all the better when it was done.

He put the pen back and stood with his eyes closed, trying to calm himself again, trying to think only, It is done.

The most curious thoughts were flooding him suddenly, that he could undo this! That it had been no more than an impulse; that he could roll back the minutes and his uncle would be alive again. This positively could not have happened! Poison . . . coffee . . . Lawrence dead.

And then a memory came to him, pure and quiet and certainly welcome, of the day twenty-one years ago when his cousin Julie had been born. His uncle and he sitting in the drawing room together. His uncle Lawrence, whom he loved more than his father.

"But I want you to know that you will always be my nephew, my beloved nephew . . ."

Dear God, was he losing his mind? For a moment he did not even know where he was. He could have sworn someone else was in this room with him. Who was it?

That thing in the mummy case. Don't look at it. Like a witness. Get back to the business at hand.

The papers are signed; the stock can be sold; and now there is all the more reason for Julie to marry that stupid twit Alex Savarell. And all the more reason for Henry's father to take Stratford Shipping completely in hand.

Yes. Yes. But what to do at the moment? He looked at the desk again. Everything as it was. And those six glittering gold Cleopatra coins. Ah, yes, take one. Quickly, he slipped it into his pocket. A little flush warmed his face. Yes, the coin must be worth a fortune. And he could fit it into a cigarette case; simple to smuggle. All right.

Now get out of here immediately. No, he wasn't thinking. He couldn't still his heart. Shout for Samir, that was the appropriate action. Something horrible has happened to Lawrence. Stroke, heart attack, impossible to tell! And this cell is like a furnace. A doctor must come at once.

"Samir!" he cried out, staring forward like a matinee actor at the moment of shock. His gaze fell directly again on that grim, loathsome thing in the linen wrappings. Was it staring back at him? Were its eyes open beneath the bandages? Preposterous! Yet the illusion struck a deep shrill note of panic in him, which gave just the right edge to his next shout for help.

FURTIVELY THE clerk read the latest edition of the London Herald, the pages folded and held carefully out of sight behind his darkly lacquered desk. The office was quiet now because of the board meeting, the only sound the distant clack of a typewriting machine from an adjoining room.

MUMMY'S CURSE KILLS STRATFORD SHIPPING MAGNATE "RAMSES THE DAMNED" STRIKES DOWN THOSE WHO DISTURB HIS REST

How the tragedy had caught the public imagination. Impossible to walk a step without seeing a front-page story. And how the popular newspapers elaborated upon it, indulging in hastily drawn illustrations of pyramids and camels, of the mummy in his wooden coffin and poor Mr. Stratford lying dead at his feet.

Poor Mr. Stratford, who had been such a fine man to work for; remembered now for this lurid and sensational death.

Just when the furore had died down, it had been given another infusion of vitality:

HEIRESS DEFIES MUMMY'S CURSE "RAMSES THE DAMNED" TO VISIT LONDON

The clerk turned the page now quietly, folding the paper into a narrow thick column width again. Hard to believe Miss Stratford was bringing home all the treasure to be placed on exhibit in her own home in Mayfair. But that is what her father had always done.

The clerk hoped that he'd be invited to the reception, but there was no chance of it, even though he had been with Stratford Shipping for some thirty years.

To think, a bust of Cleopatra, the only authenticated portrait in existence. And freshly minted coins with her image and name. Ah, he would have liked to see those things in Mr. Stratford's library. But he would have to wait until the British Museum claimed the collection and put it on display for lord and commoner alike.

And there were things he might have told Miss Stratford, if ever there had been an opportunity, things perhaps old Mr. Lawrence would have wanted her to know.

For instance, that Henry Stratford hadn't sat behind his desk for a year now, yet he still collected a full salary and bonuses; and that Mr. Randolph wrote him cheques on the company funds at random and then doctored the books.

But perhaps the young woman would find out all this for herself. The will had left her full control of her father's company. And that's why she was in the boardroom, with her handsome fiance, Alex Savarell, Viscount Summer-field, right now.

Randolph could not bear to see her crying like this. Dreadful to be pressing her with papers to sign. She looked all the more fragile in her black mourning; her face drawn and shimmering as if she were feverish; her eyes full of that odd light that he had first seen when she told him that her father was dead.

The other board members sat in sullen silence, eyes downcast. Alex held her arm gently. He looked faintly baffled, as if he really didn't understand death; it was just that he didn't want her to suffer. Simple soul. Out of place among these merchants and men of business; the porcelain aristocrat with his heiress.

Why must we go through with this? Why are we not alone with our grief?

Yet Randolph did it because he had to do it, though never had the whole thing seemed so meaningless. Never had his love for his only son been so painfully tried.

"I simply cannot make decisions yet, Uncle Randolph," she said to him politely.

"Of course not, my dear," he answered. "No one expects you to. If you'll only sign this draft for emergency funds and leave the rest to us."

"I want to go over everything, to take a hand in things," she said. "That's clearly what Father intended. This whole situation with the warehouses in India, I don't understand how it could have come to such a crisis." She paused, unwilling to be caught up in things, perhaps utterly incapable of it, and the tears flowed silently again.

"Leave it to me, Julie," he said wearily. "I've been handling crises in India for years."

He pushed the documents towards her. Sign, please, sign. Do not ask for explanations now. Do not add humiliation to this pain.

For that is what was so surprising, that he missed his brother so much. We don't know what we feel for those we love until they're taken. All night he'd lain awake remembering things . . . the Oxford days, their first trips to Egypt-Randolph, Lawrence and Elliott Savarell. Those nights in Cairo. He had awakened early and gone through old photographs, and papers. Such mar-velously vivid memories.

And now, without spirit or will, he tried to cheat Lawrence's daughter. He tried to cover for ten years of lies and deceit. Lawrence had built Stratford Shipping because he really didn't care about money. Oh, the risks that Lawrence used to take. And what had Randolph done since he took over? Hold the reins and steal. To his utter amazement Julie lifted the pen and signed her name quickly on all the various papers, without so much as reading them. Well, he was safe from her inevitable questions for a little while.

I'm sorry, Lawrence. It was like a silent prayer. Perhaps if you knew the whole story.

"In a few days, Uncle Randolph, I want to sit down and go over everything with you. I think that's what Father wanted. But I'm so tired. It's really time to go home."

"Yes, let me take you home now," Alex said immediately. He helped her to her feet.

Dear good Alex. Why couldn't my son have had a mere particle of that gentleness? The whole world could have been his. Quickly Randolph went to open the double doors. To his amazement he found the men from the British Museum waiting. An annoyance. He would have spirited her out another way, if he had known. He did not like the unctuous Mr. Hancock, who behaved as if everything Lawrence had discovered belonged to the museum and the world.

"Miss Stratford," the man said now as he approached Julie. "Everything has been approved. The first showing of the mummy will take place in your home, just as your father would have wished. We will of course catalogue everything, and remove the collection to the museum as soon as you wish it. I thought you would want to have my personal assurance. . . ."

"Of course," Julie answered wearily. This interested her no more than the board meeting, obviously. "I'm grateful to you, Mr. Hancock. You know what this discovery meant to my father." There was a pause again as if she would begin crying. And why not? "I only wish I'd been with him in Egypt."

"Darling, he died where he'd been most happy," Alex offered lamely. "And among the things he loved."

Pretty words. Lawrence had been cheated. He'd had his momentous find for only a few short hours. Even Randolph understood as much.

Hancock took Julie's arm. They moved towards the door together.

"Of course it's impossible to authenticate the remains until we make a thorough examination. The coins, the bust, these are quite unprecedented discoveries."

"We'll make no extravagant claims, Mr. Hancock. I only want a small reception for Father's oldest friends."

She offered her hand now, in effect dismissing him. She managed such things so decisively, so like her father. So like the Earl of Rutherford when you thought about it. Hers had always been an aristocratic manner. And if only the marriage were to take place. . . .

"Good-bye, Uncle Randolph."

He bent to kiss her cheek.

"I love you, darling," he whispered. It surprised him. And so did the smile that spread across her face. Did she hear what he had meant to tell her? I am so sorry, sorry for everything, my dear.

Alone at last on the marble staircase. All of them gone but Alex, and in her heart of hearts, she wished that he were gone too.

She wanted nothing so much now as the quiet interior of her Rolls-Royce limousine with the glass shutting out the noise of the world around her.

"Now, I'm going to say this only once, Julie," Alex said as he helped her down the stairs. "But it comes from my soul. Don't let this tragedy postpone the

marriage. I know your feelings, but you're alone in that house now. And I want to be with you, to take care of you. I want us to be husband and wife."

"Alex, I'd be lying to you," she said, "if I told you I could make a decision now. More than ever I need time to think."

She couldn't bear to look at him suddenly; he seemed so young always. Had she ever been young? The question would have made Uncle Randolph smile perhaps. She was twenty-one. But Alex at twenty-five seemed a boy to her. And it hurt her so much not to love him as he deserved to be loved.

The sunlight hurt her eyes as he opened the door to the street. She brought the veil down from the brim of her hat. No reporters, thank God no reporters, and the big black motor car there waiting with the door open.

"I won't be alone, Alex," she said gently. "I have Rita and Oscar there. And Henry's moving back into his old room. Uncle Randolph insisted upon it. I'll have more company than I need." Henry. The last person in the world she wanted to see was Henry. What an irony that he had indeed been the last person her father saw before his eyes closed in death.

The reporters mobbed Henry Stratford as he came ashore. Had the mummy's curse frightened him? Had he glimpsed anything supernatural at work in the little rock chamber where the death of Lawrence Stratford had taken place? Henry fought his way through customs in silence, ignoring the noisy, smoky flashes of the cameras. With icy impatience he glared at the officials, who checked his few suitcases and then waved him past.

His heart thudded in his ears. He wanted a drink. He wanted the quiet of his own home in Mayfair. He wanted his mistress, Daisy Banker. He wanted anything but the dreary ride with his father. He avoided Randolph's eyes altogether as he climbed into the back of the Rolls.

As the long cumbersome saloon forced its way out of the thick traffic, he caught a glimpse of Samir Ibrahim greeting a group of black-dressed men-undoubtedly busybodies from the museum. What a fortunate thing that this corpse of Ramses the Great concerned everyone far more than the corpse of Lawrence Stratford, which had been buried without ceremony in Egypt, just as Lawrence had wished.

Good Lord, his father looked dreadful, as if he'd aged overnight some ten years. He was even a little disheveled.

"Do you have a cigarette?" Henry asked sharply.

Without looking at him his father produced a small thin cigar and a light.

"The marriage is still the essential thing," Randolph murmured almost as if he were speaking to himself. "A new bride simply doesn't have time to think about business. And for the time being, I've arranged for you to stay with her. She cannot remain alone."

"Good Lord, Father, this is the twentieth century! Why the hell can't she remain alone!"

Stay in that house, and with that disgusting mummy on display in the library? It sickened him. He closed his eyes, savored the cigar silently, and thought of his mistress. A series of sharp, erotic images passed quickly through his mind.

"Damn it, you do what I tell you," his father said. But the voice lacked conviction. Randolph gazed out the window. "You'll stay there and keep an eye on her and do what you can to see she consents to the marriage as quickly as

possible. Do your best to see that she doesn't move away from Alex. I think Alex has begun to irritate her slightly.'

"Small wonder. If Alex had any gumption . . ."

"The marriage is good for her. It's good for everyone."

"All right, all right, let's drop it!"

Silence as the car moved on. There was time for dinner with Daisy, and a long rest at the flat before he hit the gambling tables at Flint's, that is, if he could force a little immediate cash out of his father. . . .

"He didn't suffer, did he?"

Henry gave a little start.

"What? What are you talking about?"

"Your uncle?" his father asked, turning to him for the first time. "The late Lawrence Stratford, who has just died in Egypt? Did he suffer, for the love of God, or did he go quietly?"

' 'One minute he was fine, the next he was lying on the floor. He was gone within seconds. Why do you ask about something like that?"

"You're such a sentimental young bastard, aren't you?"

"I couldn't prevent it!"

For one moment, the atmosphere of that close little cell came back to him, the acrid smell of the poison. And that thing, that thing in the mummy case, and the grim illusion that it had been watching.

"He was a pigheaded old fool," Randolph said almost in a whisper. "But I loved him."

"Did you really?" Henry turned sharply and peered into his father's face. "He's left everything to her, and you loved him!"

"He settled plenty on both of us a long time ago. It ought to have been enough, more than enough--"

"It's a pittance compared to what she's inherited!"

"I won't discuss this."

Patience, Henry thought. Patience. He sat back against the soft grey upholstery. I need a hundred pounds at least and I won't get it like this.

Daisy Banker watched through the lace curtains as Henry stepped out of the cab below. She lived in a long flat above the music hail, where she sang every night from ten P.M. until two in the morning; a soft ripe peach of a woman with big drowsy blue eyes and silver blond hair. Her voice was nothing much and she knew it; but they liked her, they did. They liked her very much.

And she liked Henry Stratford, or so she told herself. He was certainly the best thing that had ever happened to her. He'd got her the job below, though how she could never quite work out; and he paid for the flat, or at least he was supposed to. She knew there was quite a bit owing, but then he was just back from Egypt.

He'd make it right or shut up anyone who questioned him about it. He was very good at doing that.

She ran to the mirror as she heard his tread on the stairs. She pulled down the feathered collar of her peignoir and straightened the pearls at her throat. She pinched her cheeks to work up the blush just as his key turned in the lock.

"Well, I'd just about given up on you, I had!" she bawled as he came into the room. But oh, the sight of him. It never failed to work on her. He was so very handsome with his dark brown hair and eyes; and the way he conducted himself, so truly the gentleman. She loved the way he removed his cloak now and threw it carelessly over the chair, and beckoned for her to come into his arms. So lazy he was; and so full of himself! But why shouldn't he be?

"And my motor car? You promised me a motor car of my own before you left. Where is it! That wasn't it downstairs. That was a cab."

There was something so cold in his smile. When he kissed her, his lips hurt her a little; and his fingers bit into the soft flesh of her upper arms. She felt a vague chill move up her spine; her mouth tingled. She kissed him again and when he led her into the bedroom she didn't say a word.

"I'll get you your motor car," he whispered into her ear as he tore off the peignoir and pressed her against him so that her nipples touched the scratchy surface of his starched shirt. She kissed his cheek, then his chin, licking the faint stubble of his beard. Lovely to feel him breathe this way, to feel his hands on her shoulders.

"Not too rough, sir," she whispered.

"Why not?"

The telephone rang. She could have ripped it from the wall.

She unbuttoned his shirt for him as he answered.

"I told you not to call again, Sharpies."

Oh, that bloody son of a bitch, she thought miserably. She wished he was dead. She'd worked for Sharpies before Henry Stratford had rescued her. And Sharpies was a mean one, plain and simple. He had left his scar on her, a tiny half-moon on the back of her neck.

"I told you I'd pay you when I got back, didn't I? Suppose you give me time to unpack my trunk!" He jammed down the little cone of a receiver into the hook. She pushed the phone back out of the way on the marble-top table.

"Come here to me, sweetheart," she said as she sat on the bed.

But her eyes dulled slightly as she watched him staring at the telephone. He was broke still, wasn't he? Stone broke.

Strange. There had been no wake in this house for her father. And now the painted coffin of Ramses the Great was being carried carefully through the double drawing rooms as if by pallbearers, and into the library, which he had always called the Egyptian room. A wake for the mummy; and the chief mourner was not here.

Julie watched as Samir directed the men from the museum to place the coffin carefully upright in the southeast corner, to the left of the open conservatory doors. A perfect position. Anyone entering the house could see it immediately.

All those in the drawing rooms would have a good view of it; and the mummy himself would appear to have a view of all assembled to pay him homage when the lid was lifted and the body itself was revealed. The scrolls and alabaster jars would be arranged on the long marble table beneath the mirror to the left of the upright coffin, along the east wall. The bust of Cleopatra was already being placed on a stand in the center of the room. The gold coins would go in a special display case beside the marble table. And other miscellaneous treasures could now be arranged any way that Samir saw fit.

The soft afternoon sunlight poured in from the conservatory, throwing its intricate dancing patterns over the golden mask of the King's face and his folded arms.

Gorgeous it was, authentic obviously. Only a fool would question such a treasure. But what did the whole story mean?

Oh, if only they were all gone, Julie thought, and she could be alone now to study it. But the men would be here forever examining the exhibit. And Alex, what to do about Alex, who stood beside her, and gave her not a moment to herself?

Of course she'd been glad to see Samir, though it had stirred her own pain to see the pain in him.

And he looked stiff and uncomfortable in his black Western suit and starched white shirt. In the silks of his native dress, he was a dark-eyed prince, quite removed from the dreary routines of this noisy century and its bludgeoning drive to progress. Here he looked foreign, and almost servile in spite of the imperious manner in which he ordered the workmen about.

Alex stared at the workmen and their relics with the strangest expression. What was it? These things meant nothing to him; they had to do with some other world. But did he not find them beautiful? Ah, it was so difficult for her to understand. ' 'I wonder if there is a curse,' he whispered softly. "Oh, please, don't be ridiculous," Julie answered. "Now, they're going to be working for some time. Why don't we go on • back into the conservatory and have tea?"

"Yes, we should do that," he said. It was dislike in his face, wasn't it? Not confusion. He felt nothing for these treasures. They were alien to him; they did not matter one way or the other. She might have felt the same way gazing at a modern machine she did not understand.

It saddened her. But everything saddened her now-and most of all the fact that her father had had so little time with these many treasures, that he had died on the very day of his greatest discovery. And that she was the one who must savour each and every article that he had uncovered in this mysterious and controversial grave.

Perhaps after tea, Alex would understand that she wanted to be alone. She led him down the hall now, past the double doors of the drawing rooms, past the doors of the library and out through the marble alcove into the glass room of ferns and flowers that ran across the entire back of the house.

This had been Father's favourite place when he was not in the library. No accident that his desk and his books were only a few feet away, through those glass doors.

They sat down at the wicker table together, the sun playing beautifully on the silver tea service before them.

"You pour, dearest," she said to Alex. She laid out the cakes on the plates. Now that gave him something to do which he understood.

Had she ever known a human being who could do all the little things so well? Alex could ride, dance, shoot, pour tea, mix delicious American cocktails, slip into the protocol of Buckingham Palace without batting an eyelash. He could read an occasional poem with such a simulation of feeling that it made her weep. He could kiss very well, too, and there was no doubt that marriage with him would have its deeply sensuous moments. No doubt whatsoever. But what else would it have?

She felt selfish suddenly. Wasn't all that enough? It hadn't been for her father, a merchant prince whose manners were indistinguishable from those of aristocratic friends. It had meant nothing at all.

"Drink it, darling, you need it," Alex said to her, offering her the cup the way she liked it. No milk, no sugar. Only a thin slice of lemon.

Imagine anyone really needing tea.

It seemed the light changed around her; a shadow. She looked up to see that Samir had come silently into the room.

"Samir. Sit down. Join us."

He motioned for her to remain where she was. He was holding a leather-bound book in his hands.

"Julie," he said with a slow and deliberate glance in the direction of the Egyptian room, "I brought your father's notebook to you. I didn't want to give it to the people at the museum."

"Oh, I'm so glad. Do join us, please."

"No, I must return to work immediately. I want to make sure things are done as they should be. And you must read this notebook, Julie. The newspapers, they published only the bare bones of this story. There is more here. ..."

"Come, sit down," she pressed again. "We'll take care of that together, later."

After a moment's hesitation, he gave in. He took the chair beside her, giving a little polite nod to Alex, to whom he'd been introduced before.

"Julie, your father had only begun his translations. You know his command of the ancient tongues. . . ."

"Yes, I'm eager to read it. But what is really troubling you?" she said earnestly. "What is wrong?"

Samir pondered, then: "Julie, I am uneasy about this discovery. I am uneasy about the mummy and the poisons contained in the tomb."

"Were they really Cleopatra's poisons?" Alex said quickly. "Or is that something the reporters dreamed up?"

"No one can say," Samir answered politely.

"Samir, everything is carefully labeled," Julie said. "The servants had been told."

"You don't believe in the curse now, do you?" Alex asked.

Samir made a little polite smile. "No. Nevertheless," he said, turning back to Julie. "Promise me that if you see anything strange, even if you suffer a presentiment, you will call me at the museum at once.'"

"But, Samir, I never expected you to believe-"

"Julie, curses are rare in Egypt," he said quickly. "And the admonitions written on this mummy case are most severe. The story of the creature's immortality, there are more details in this little book,"

"But you don't think Father really succumbed to a curse, Samir."

"No. But the things found in the tomb defy explanation. Except if one believes ... But then that is absurd. I ask only that you take nothing for granted. That you call me if you need me at once."

He took his leave of her abruptly, and went back into the library. She could hear him speaking Arabic to one of the workmen. She watched them uneasily through the open doors.

Grief, she thought. It's a strange and a misunderstood emotion. He grieves for Father as I do, and so the whole discovery is ruined for him. How difficult all this must be.

And he would have so enjoyed all of it if only . . . Well, she understood. It was not so with her. She wanted nothing so much as to be alone with Ramses the Great and his Cleopatra. But she understood. And the pain of Father's loss would be there forever. She didn't really want it to go away. She looked at Alex, poor lost boy staring at her with such concern.

"I love you," he whispered suddenly.

"Why, what on earth has come over you!" She laughed softly.

He looked baffled, childlike. Her handsome fiance was really suffering suddenly. She couldn't bear it.

"I don't know," he said. "Maybe I'm having a presentiment. Is that what he called it? I only know I want to remind you-I love you."

"Oh, Alex, dear Alex." She bent forward and kissed him, and felt his sudden desperate clasp of her hand.

The gaudy little clock on Daisy's dressing table rang six.

Henry sat back, stretched, then reached for the champagne again, filling his glass, then hers.

She looked drowsy still, the thin satin strap of her nightgown fallen down over one rounded arm.

"Drink, darling," he said.

"Not me, lovey. Singing tonight," she said with an arrogant lift of her chin. "I can't drink all day like some I know." She tore off a bit of meat from the roasted fowl on her plate, and put it in her mouth crudely. Beautiful mouth. "But this cousin of yours! She's not afraid of the bloody mummy! Putting it right there in her own house!"

Big stupid blue eyes fixed on him; just the kind he liked. Though he missed Malenka, his Egyptian beauty; he really did. The thing about an Eastern woman was she didn't have to be stupid; she could be clever, and just as easy to manage. With a girl like Daisy, the stupidity was essential; and then you had to talk to her-and talk to her and talk to her.

"Why the hell should she be afraid of the damned mummy!" he said irritably. "The daft part is giving the whole treasure to a museum. She doesn't know what money is, my cousin. She has too much of it to know. He increased my trust fund by a pittance and he leaves her a shipping empire. He's the one who was ..."

He stopped. The little chamber; the sunlight falling in shafts on that thing. He saw it again. Saw what he had done! No. Not right. Died of a heart attack or a stroke, he did-the man lying sprawled on the sandy floor, I didn't do it. And that thing, it hadn't been staring through the wrappings, that was absurd!

He drank the champagne too quickly. Ah, but it was good, He filled his glass again.

"But a bleeding mummy in the very house with her," Daisy said.

And suddenly, violently, he saw those eyes again, beneath rotted bandages, staring at him. Yes, staring. Stop it, you fool, you did what you had to do! Stop it or you will go mad.

He rose from the table a bit clumsily and put on his jacket, and straightened his silk tie.

"But where are you going?" Daisy asked. "You're a bit too drunk to be going out now, if you ask me."

"But I didn't," he answered. She knew where he was going. He had the hundred pounds he'd managed to squeeze out of Randolph, and the casino was open. It had opened at dark.

He wanted to be there alone now, so that he could truly concentrate. Merely thinking of it, of the green baize under the lamps and the sound of the dice and roulette wheel, engendered a deep excitement in him. One good win, and he'd quit, he promised himself. And with a hundred pounds to start. No, he couldn't wait. . . .

Of course he'd run into Sharpies, and he owed Sharpies too much money, but how the hell was he supposed to pay it back if he didn't get to the tables, and though he didn't feel lucky-no, not lucky at all tonight-well, he had to give it a try.

"Just wait now, sir. Sit down, sir," Daisy said, coming after him. "Have another glass with me and then a little nap. It's barely six o'clock."

"Let me alone," he said. He put on his greatcoat and pulled on his leather gloves. Sharpies. A stupid man, Sharpies. He felt in his coat pocket for the knife he'd carried for years. Yes, still there. He drew it out now, and examined the thin steel blade. "Oh no, sir," Daisy gasped.

"Don't be a fool," he said offhandedly, and closing the knife and putting it back into his pocket he went out the door.

No sound now but the low gurgling of the fountain in the conservatory, the ashen twilight long gone, the Egyptian room lighted only by the green shaded lamp on Lawrence's desk.

Julie sat in her father's leather chair, back to the wall, her silk peignoir soft and comfortable, and surprisingly warm, her hand on the diary which she had not yet read.

The glittering mask of Ramses the Great was ever so slightly frightening, the large almond-shaped eyes peering into the soft shadows; the marble Cleopatra appeared to glow. And so beautiful the coins mounted on black velvet against the far wall.

She had inspected them carefully earlier. Same profile as the bust, same rippling hair beneath its gold tiara. A Greek Cleopatra, not the silly Egyptian image so popular in programmes for Shakespeare's tragedy, or in the engravings which illustrated Plutarch's Lives and popular histories galore.

Profile of a beautiful woman; strong, not tragic. Strong as Romans loved their heroes and heroines to be strong.

The thick scrolls of parchment and papyrus looked all too fragile as they lay heaped on the marble table. The other items could also be easily destroyed by prying hands. Quill pens, ink pots, a little silver burner meant for oil, it seemed, with a ring in which to position a glass vial. The vials themselves lay beside it-exquisite specimens of early glasswork, each with a tiny silver cap. Of course all these little relics, and the string of alabaster jars behind them, were protected by small, neatly inscribed signs which read: "Please do not touch."

Nevertheless, it worried her, so many coming here to view these things.

"Remember, it's poison, most definitely," Julie had told Rita and Oscar, her indispensable maid and butler. And that had been enough to keep them out of the room!

"It's a body, miss," Rita had said. "A dead body! Never mind it's an Egyptian King. I say leave the dead alone, miss."

Julie had laughed softly to herself. "The British Museum is full of dead bodies, Rita."

If only the dead could come back. If only the ghost of her father would come to her. Imagine such a miracle. Having him again, speaking to him, hearing his voice. What happened, Father? Did you suffer? Was there even one second when you were afraid?

Yes, she wouldn't have minded such a visitation at all. But no such thing would ever happen. That was the horror. We went from the cradle to the grave beset by mundane tragedies. The splendour of the supernatural was a thing for stories and poems, and Shakespeare's plays.

But why dwell on it? Now had come the moment to be alone with her father's treasures, and to read the last words he wrote.

She turned the pages now to the date of the discovery. And the first words she saw made her eyes fill with tears.

Must write to Julie, describe everything. Hieroglyphs on the door virtually free of error; must have been written by one who knew what he was writing. Yet the Greek is entirely of the Ptolemaic period. And the Latin is sophisticated. Impossible, Yet there it is. Samir uncommonly fearful and superstitious. Must sleep for a few hours. Am going in tonight!

There was a hasty ink sketch of the door of the tomb and its three broad paragraphs of writing. Hastily she turned to the next page.

Nine P.M. by my watch. Inside the chamber at last. Appears to be a library rather than a tomb. The man has been laid to rest in a King's coffin beside a desk on which he has left some thirteen scrolls. He writes entirely in Latin, with obvious haste but no carelessness. There are droplets of ink all over, but the text is completely coherent.

"Call me Ramses the Damned. For that is the name I have given myself. But I was once Ramses the Great of Upper and Lower Egypt, slayer of the Hittites, Father of many sons and daughters, who ruled Egypt for sixty-four years. My monuments are still standing; the stele recount my victories, though a thousand years have passed since I was pulled, a mortal child, from the womb.

"Ah, fatal moment now buried by time, when from a Hittite priestess I took the cursed elixir. Her warnings I would not heed. Immortality I craved. And so I drank the potion in the brimming cup. And now, long centuries gone by-amid the poisons of my lost Queen, I hide the potion which she would not accept from me-my doomed Cleopatra."

Julie stopped. The elixir, hidden amongst these poisons? She realized what Samir had meant. The papers had not told that part of the little mystery. Tantalizing. These poisons hide a formula that can grant eternal life.

"But who would create such a fiction!" she whispered.

She found herself staring at the marble bust of Cleopatra. Immortality. Why would Cleopatra not drink the potion? Oh, but really, she was beginning to believe it! She smiled.

She turned the page of the diary. The translation was interrupted. Her father had written only:

Goes on to describe how Cleopatra awakened him from his dream-filled sleep, how he tutored her, loved her, watched her seduce the Roman leaders one by one. . .

.

"Yes," Julie whispered. "Julius Caesar first and then Mark Antony. But why would she not take the elixir?" There was another paragraph of translation:

"How can I bear this burden any longer? How can I endure the loneliness anymore? Yet I can not die. Her poisons can not harm me. They keep my elixir safe so that I may dream of still other Queens, both fair and wise, to share the centuries with me. But is it not her face I see? Her voice I hear? Cleopatra. Yesterday. Tomorrow. Cleopatra. "

Latin followed. Several scribbled paragraphs in Latin which Julie could not read. Even with the aid of a dictionary she could not have translated it. Then there were a few lines of demotic Egyptian, even more nearly impenetrable than that Latin. Nothing more.

She laid down the book. She fought the inevitable tears. It was almost as if she could feel the presence of her father in this room. How excited he must have been, what a lovely scribble his handwriting had become.

And how lovely the whole mystery was.

Somewhere among all those poisons, an elixir that conveyed immortality? One need not take it literally to find it beautiful.

And behold that tiny silver burner and the delicate vial. Ramses the Damned had believed it. Perhaps her father had believed it. And for the moment, well, maybe she did too.

She rose slowly and approached the long marble table against the opposite wall. The scrolls were too fragile. There were tiny bits and pieces of papyrus scattered everywhere. She had seen this damage done as the men lifted them ever so carefully from their crates. She dared not touch them. Besides, she couldn't read them.

As for the jars, she mustn't touch them either. What if some of that poison were spilled, or somehow released into the air?

She found herself suddenly looking at her own reflection in the mirror on the wall. She went back to the desk, and opened the folded newspaper that lay there.

Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra was enjoying a long run in London. She and Alex had meant to go and see it, but then Alex fell asleep during serious plays. Only Gilbert and Sullivan entertained Alex. and even then he was usually nodding off by the end of the third act.

She studied the little announcement for the performance. She stood up and reached for Plutarch on the bookshelf above the desk.

Where was the story of Cleopatra? Plutarch had not devoted a full biography to her. No, her story was contained in that of Mark Antony, of course.

She paged quickly to the passages she only dimly remembered. Cleopatra had been a great Queen, and what we call now a great politician. She had not only seduced Caesar and Antony, she kept Egypt free of Roman conquest for decades, finally taking her own life when Antony was dead by his own hand, and Octavius Caesar had stormed her gates. The loss of Egypt to Rome had been inevitable, but she had almost turned the tide. Had Julius Caesar not been assassinated, he might have made Cleopatra his Empress. Had Mark Antony been a little stronger, Octavian might have been overthrown.

Even in her final days, however, Cleopatra had been victorious in her own way. Octavian wanted to take her to Rome as a royal prisoner. She had cheated him. She had tried out dozens of poisons on condemned prisoners, and then chosen the bite of a snake to end her life. The Roman guards had not prevented her suicide. And so Octavian took possession of Egypt. But Cleopatra he could not have.

Julie closed the book almost reverently. She looked at the long row of alabaster jars. Could these really be those very poisons?

She fell into a strange reverie as she gazed at the magnificent coffin. A hundred like it she had seen here and in Cairo. A hundred like it she had examined ever since she could remember. Only this one contained a man who claimed to be immortal. Who claimed to be entering not death when he was buried, but "a dream-filled sleep."

What was the secret of that slumber? Of being awakened from it? And the elixir!

"Ramses the Damned," she whispered. "Would you wake for me as you did for Cleopatra? Would you wake for a new century of indescribable marvels even though your Queen is dead?"

No answer but silence; and the large soft eyes of the golden King staring at her, graven hands folded over his chest.

"That's robbery!" Henry said, barely able to contain his anger. "The thing's priceless." He glared at the little man behind the desk in the back office of the coin shop. Miserable little thief in his stuffy world of dirty glass cases and bits and pieces of money displayed as if they were jewels.

"If it's genuine, yes," the man answered slowly. "And if it's genuine, where did it come from? A coin like this with a perfect image of Cleopatra? That's what they will want to know, you see, where did it come from? And you have not told me your name.'"

"No, I haven't." Exasperated, he snatched the coin back from the dealer, slipped it into his pocket and turned to go. He stopped long enough to put on his gloves. What did he have left? Fifty pounds? He was in a fury. He let the door slam behind him as he walked into the biting wind.

The dealer sat quite still for a long moment. He could still feel the coin that he had let slip literally from his hand. Never in all these long years had he seen anything quite like it. He knew it was genuine, and suddenly he felt the fool as never before in his life.

He should have bought it! He should have taken the risk. But he knew it was stolen, and not even for the Queen of the Nile could he become a thief.

He rose from the desk, and passed through the dusty serge curtains that separated his shop from a tiny drawing room where he spent much of his time, even during business hours, quite alone. His newspaper lay beside the wing chair where he'd left it. He opened now to the headline:

STRATFORD MUMMY AND HIS CURSE COME TO LONDON

The ink drawing beneath showed a slender young man disembarking from the P&O H.M.S. Melpomine along with the mummy of the famed Ramses the Damned. Henry Stratford, nephew of the dead archaeologist, said the caption. Yes, that was the man who had just left his shop. Had he stolen the coin from the tomb where his uncle died so suddenly? And how many more like it had he taken? The dealer was confused; relieved on the one hand, and full of regret on the other. He stared at the telephone.

Noon. The club dining room was quiet, the few scattered members eating their lunch alone on white-draped tables in silence. Just the way Randolph liked it, a true retreat from the noisy streets outside, and the endless pressure and confusion of his office.

He was not happy when he saw his son standing in the door some fifty feet away. Hasn't slept all night, more than likely. Yet Henry was shaven, neatly dressed, Randolph gave him that much. The little things were never out of Henry's control. It was the great disaster with which he couldn't cope—that he had no real life any longer. That he was a gambler and a drinker with no soul.

Randolph went back to his soup.

He didn't look up as his son took the chair opposite, and called to the waiter for a Scotch and water "at once."

"I told you to stay at your cousin's last night," Randolph said gloomily. There was no point to this conversation. "I left the key for you."

"I picked up the key, thank you. And my cousin is no doubt doing quite well without me. She has her mummy to keep her company."

The waiter set down the glass and Henry drained it at once.

Randolph took another slow spoon of the hot soup.

"Why the hell do you dine in a place like this? It's been out of fashion for a decade. It's positively funereal."

"Keep your voice down."

"Why should I? All the members are deaf."

Randolph sat back in the chair. He gave a small nod to the waiter, who moved in to take the soup plate. "It's my club and I like it," he said dully. Meaningless. All conversation with his son was meaningless. He would weep if he thought of it. He would weep if he lingered too long on the fact that Henry's hands trembled, that his face was pale and drawn, and that his eyes fixed on nothing-eyes of an addict, a drunk.

"Bring the bottle," Henry said to the waiter, without looking up. And to his father, "I'm down to twenty pounds."

"I can't advance you anything!" Randolph said wearily. "As long as she's in control, the situation is very simply desperate. You don't understand."

"You're lying to me. I know she signed papers yesterday. ..."

"You've drawn a year's salary in advance."

"Father, I must have another hundred. ..."

"If she examines the books herself, I may have to confess everything; and ask for another chance."

It filled him with surprising relief merely to say it. Perhaps it was what he wanted. He gazed at his son from a great remove suddenly. Yes, he should tell his niece everything, and ask for her . . . what? Her help.

Henry was sneering.

"Throwing ourselves on her mercy. Oh, that's lovely."

Randolph looked away, across the long vista of white-draped tables. Only one stooped grey-haired figure remained now, dining alone, in a far corner. The elderly Viscount Stephenson- one of the old landed gentry who still had the bank account to support his vast estates. Well, dine in peace, my friend, Randolph thought wearily.

"What else can we do!" he said softly now to his son. "You might come to work tomorrow. At least make an appearance. ..."

Was his son listening, his son who had been miserable for as long as Randolph could remember, his son who had no future, no ambitions, no plans, no dreams?

It broke his heart suddenly, the thought of it-the long years since his son had been anything but desperate, and furtive, and bitter as well. It broke his heart to see his son's eyes darting anxiously over the simple objects of the table-the heavy silver, the napkin which he had not yet unfolded. The glass and the bottle of Scotch.

"All right, I'll give you some on account," he said. What would another hundred pounds matter? And this was his only son. His only son.

A somber yet undeniably exciting occasion. When Elliott arrived, the Stratford house was crowded to overflowing. He had always loved this house, with its uncommonly large rooms, and its dramatic central stairway.

So much dark wood, so many towering bookshelves; and yet it had a cheerful atmosphere with the wicked abundance of electric light and the never-ending stretches of gilded wallpaper. But he missed Lawrence sharply as he stood in the front hall. He felt Lawrence here; and all the wasted moments of their friendship came back to torment him. And the long-ago love affair that haunted him still.

Well, he had known it would happen. But there was nowhere else on earth that he wanted to be tonight, except in Lawrence's house for the first official showing of Ramses the Damned, Lawrence's discovery. He made a light dismissive gesture to fend off those who immediately came towards him, and bowing his head he pushed his way gently through strangers and old friends until he reached the Egyptian room. The pain in his legs was bad tonight, because of the damp, as he always said. But luckily he wouldn't have to stand long. And he had a new walking stick that he rather liked, a fancy affair with a silver handle.

"Thank you, Oscar," he said with the usual smile as he took his first glass of white wine.

"Not a moment too soon, old boy," Randolph said to him wearily. "They're going to unveil the ghastly thing now. Might as well come along."

Elliott nodded. Randolph looked dreadful, no doubt about it. He'd had the wind knocked out of him by Lawrence's death. But he was doing his best here, it was obvious.

They moved together into the front ranks-and for the first time, Elliott laid eyes upon the startlingly beautiful coffin of the mummy.'

The innocent, childlike expression of the golden mask charmed him. Then his eyes moved to the bands of writing that girded the lower portion of the figure. Latin and Greek words written as if they were Egyptian hieroglyphs!

But he was distracted as Hancock of the British Museum called for quiet, tapping a spoon loudly on a crystal glass. Beside Hancock stood Alex, with his arm around Julie, who looked exquisite in her black mourning, her hair drawn severely back from her pale face, revealing to all the world that her features had never needed fancy coifs or other adornments.

As their eyes met, Elliott gave Julie a little melancholy smile, and saw the immediate brightening in her that always greeted him. In a way, he thought, she is more fond of me than of my son. What an irony. But then his son was staring at these proceedings as if he were utterly lost. And perhaps he was, and that was the problem.

Samir Ibrahim appeared suddenly at Hancock's left. Another old friend. But he did not see Elliott. A bit anxiously, he directed two young men to take hold of the lid of the mummy case and wait for his instructions. They stood with eyes downcast as if faintly embarrassed by the act they were about to perform. And the room went dead silent.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Samir said. The two young fellows at once hoisted the lid and moved it gracefully to one side. "I give you Ramses the Great."

The mummy lay exposed for all to see; the tall figure of a man with arms crossed on his breast, seemingly bald and naked under its thick discolored wrappings.

A collective gasp rose from the crowd. In the golden light of the electric chandeliers and the few scattered candelabra, the form was faintly horrible as they always are. Death preserved and mounted.

There was an uneasy sprinkling of applause. Shudders, even uneasy laughter; and then the thick bank of spectators broke up, some drawing in for a closer look, then backing off as if from the heat of a fire, others turning their backs on the thing altogether.

Randolph sighed and shook his head.

"Died for this, did he? I wish I understood why."

"Don't be morbid," said the man next to him, someone Elliott ought to remember, but didn't. "Lawrence was happy-"

"Doing what he wanted to do," Elliott whispered. If he heard it said even one more time, he would weep.

Lawrence would have been happy examining his treasure.

Lawrence would have been happy translating those scrolls. Lawrence's death was a tragedy. Anyone who tried to make anything else out of it was a perfect fool.

Elliott gave Randolph's arm a gentle squeeze and left him, moving slowly towards the venerable corpse of Ramses.

It seemed the younger generation had decided en masse to block his progress as they surrounded Alex and Julie. Elliott could hear her voice in snatches as conversation regained its spirited volume all around.

"... a remarkable story in the papyri," Julie explained. "But Father had only begun his translation. I should like to know what you think, Elliott."

"What was that, my dear?" He had just reached the mummy itself and he was staring at the face, marveling at how easily one could discern an expression under so many layers of decomposing cloth. He took her hand now as she moved close to him. Others pressed in, trying to get a good look, but Elliott stood his ground rather selfishly.

"Your opinion, Elliott, of the whole mystery," Julie said. "Is this a nineteenth-dynasty coffin? How did it come to be fashioned in Roman times? You know, Father told me once, you knew more about Egyptology than all the men at the museum."

He laughed softly to himself. She glanced about nervously to make sure Hancock was nowhere near. Thank God, he was in the thick of his own little crowd, explaining something about those scrolls, no doubt, and the row of exquisite jars along the wall beneath the mirror.

"What do you think?" Julie prodded again. Had seriousness ever been so seductive?

"Can't possibly be Ramses the Great, my dear," he said. "But then you know that." He studied the painted lid of the coffin again, and once more the body nestled in its dusty swathing. "An excellent job, I must say that. Not many chemicals were used; no smell of bitumen whatsoever."

"There is no bitumen," Samir said suddenly. He had been standing on Elliott's left and Elliott had not even seen him,

"And what do you make of that?" Elliott asked.

"The King has given us his own explanation," Samir said.

"Or so Lawrence told me. Ramses had himself wrapped with all due ceremony and prayers; but he was not embalmed. He was never taken from the cell where he wrote his story."

"What an amazing idea!" Elliott said. "And have you read these inscriptions yourself?" He pointed to the Latin as he translated: " 'Let not the sun shine on my remains; for in darkness I sleep; beyond all suffering; beyond all knowledge. . . .' Now that is hardly an Egyptian sentiment. I think you'll agree."

Samir's face darkened as he looked at the tiny letters. "There are curses and warnings everywhere. I was a curious man until we opened this strange tomb."

"And now you're frightened?" Not a good thing for one man to say to another. But it was true. And Julie was merely enthralled.

"Elliott, I want you to read Father's notes," she said, "before the museum gathers up everything and locks it in a vault. The man doesn't merely claim to be Ramses. There's a good deal more."

"You're not referring to the nonsense in the papers," he asked her. "About his being immortal, and loving Cleopatra."

Strange the way she looked at him. "Father translated some of it," she repeated. She glanced to the side. "I have the notebook. It's on his desk. Samir will agree with me, I think. You'll find it interesting."

But Samir was being dragged away by Hancock and some other fellow with a brittle smile. And Lady Treadwell had accosted Julie before she could go on. Wasn't Julie afraid of the curse? Elliott felt her hand slip away from his. Old Winslow Baker wanted to talk to Elliott right now. No, go away. A tall woman with withered cheeks and long white hands stood before the coffin and demanded to know if the whole thing might be a practical joke.

"Certainly not!" said Baker. "Lawrence always dug up the real thing, I 'd stake my life on it.'"

Elliott smiled. "Once the museum has these wrappings off," he said, "they'll be able to date the remains successfully. There will be internal evidence of age, of course."

"Lord Rutherford, I didn't recognize you," said the woman.

Good Lord, was he supposed to recognize her? Someone had stepped in front of her; everyone wanted to see this thing. And he ought to move, but he didn't want to.

"I can't bear to think of their cutting him open," Julie said half in a whisper. "This is the first time I've seen him," she said. "I didn't dare to open the case on my own."

"Come along, darling, there's an old friend I want you to meet," Alex said suddenly. "Father, there you are! Do get off your feet! Do you want me to help you to a chair?"

"I can manage, Alex, go on," Elliott replied. The fact was, he was used to the pain. It was like tiny knives in his joints; and tonight he could feel it even in his fingers. But he could forget about it, entirely, now and then.

And now he was alone with Ramses the Damned, with a lot of backs and shoulders turned to him. How splendid.

He narrowed his eyes as he drew very close to the mummy's face. Amazingly well formed; not desiccated at all. And certainly not the face of an old man, such as Ramses would have been at the end of a sixty-year reign.

The mouth was a young man's mouth, or at least that of a man in his prime. And the nose was slender, but not emaciated-what Englishmen call aristocratic. The ridges of the brows were prominent and the eyes themselves could not have been small. Probably a handsome man. In fact, there seemed little doubt of it.

Someone said crossly that the thing ought to be in the museum. Another that it was perfectly gruesome. And to think, these had been Lawrence's friends? Hancock was examining the gold coins on display in their velvet-lined case. Samir was beside him.

In fact, Hancock was making a fuss about something, wasn't he? Elliott knew that officious tone.

"There were five, only five? You're sure of it?" And he was speaking so loudly one would have thought Samir was deaf, not merely Egyptian.

"Quite sure. I told you," Samir said with a touch of irritation. "I cataloged the entire contents of the chamber myself."

Quite unmistakably, Hancock shifted his gaze to someone across the room. Elliott saw it was Henry Stratford, looking quite splendid in his dove-grey wool, with a black silk tie at his throat. Laughing and talking nervously, too, it seemed, with Alex and Julie and that crowd of young people whom Henry secretly loathed and resented.

Handsome as ever, Elliott thought. Handsome as when he was a boy of twenty, and that narrow elegant face could flash from a beguiling vulnerability to a chilling viciousness.

But why was Hancock staring at him? And what was he whispering now in Samir's ear? Samir looked at Hancock for a long moment, then gave a languid little shrug, his eyes moving slowly over Henry also.

How Samir must loathe all this, Elliott thought. How he must loathe that uncomfortable Western suit; he wants his gellebiyya of watered silk, and his slippers, and he should have them. What barbarians we must seem.

Elliott moved to the far corner and slipped into Lawrence's leather chair, easing it back against the wall. The crowd opened and closed at random, revealing Henry again moving away from the others, and glancing uncomfortably to right and left. Very subtle, not like a stage villain, but he's up to something, isn't he?

Henry slowly passed the marble table, his hand hovering as if he meant to touch the ancient scrolls. The crowd closed again, but Elliott merely waited. The little knot of persons in front of him shifted finally, and there was Henry, yards away, peering at a necklace on a little glass shelf, one of those many relics which Lawrence had brought home years ago.

Did anyone see Henry pick up the necklace and look at it lovingly as if he were an antiquarian? Did anyone see him slip it into his pocket and walk away, face blank, mouth rigid?

Bastard.

Elliott only smiled. He took a sip of the chilled white wine, and wished it were sherry. He wished he had not seen the little theft. He wished he had not seen Henry.

His own secret memories of Henry had never lost their painful edge, perhaps because he had never confessed what had happened to anyone. Not even to Edith, though he had told her many other sordid things about himself when wine and philosophy had made it seem imperative that he do so; and not to the Roman Catholic priests to whom he occasionally went to speak of heaven and hell in passionate ways no one else would tolerate.

He always told himself that if he did not relive those dark times, then he would forget them. But they were horridly vivid even now, some ten years after.

He had loved Henry Stratford once. And Henry Stratford was the only lover Elliott had ever had who tried to blackmail him.

Of course it had been an utter failure. Elliott had laughed in Henry's face. He'd called his bluff. "Shall I tell your father all about it? Or shall I tell your uncle Lawrence first? He's going to be furious with me ... for perhaps five minutes. But you, his favorite nephew, he will despise till the day you die because I shall tell him all of it, you see, down to the sum of money you're demanding. What was it? Five hundred pounds? You've made yourself a wretch for that, imagine."

How sullen and hurt Henry had been; how utterly confounded.

It should have been a triumph; but nothing took the sting from the overall humiliation. Henry at twenty-two—a viper with an angel's face, turning on Elliott in their Paris hotel as if he were a common boy out of the gutter.

And then there had been the little thefts. An hour after Henry had left, Elliott had discovered that his cigarette case, his money clip and all his cash were missing. His dressing gown was gone; his cuff links. Other items he could no longer remember.

He could never bring himself to mention the whole disaster. But he would have liked to needle Henry now, to slip up beside him and ask about the necklace that had just found its way into his pocket. Would Henry put it with the gold cigarette case, and the fine engraved money clip, and the diamond cuff links? Or lay it off on the same pawnbroker?

It was all too sad really. Henry had been a gifted young man; and it had all gone wrong, despite education and blood and countless opportunities. He'd started to gamble when he was no more than a boy; his drinking had become a disease by the time he was twenty-five; and now at thirty-two he had a perpetually sinister air that deepened his good looks and made him curiously repulsive in spite of them. And who suffered for it? Randolph, of course, who believed against all evidence that Henry's descent was his father's failure.

Let him go to hell, Elliott thought. Maybe he'd sought some glimmer with Henry of the flame he'd known with Lawrence, and it was all his own fault—seeing the uncle in the nephew. But no, it had started as an honest thing in its own right. And Henry Stratford had pursued him, after all. Yes, to hell with Henry.

It was the mummy Elliott had come to see. And the crowd had backed off a little again. He caught a fresh glass of wine from a passing tray, climbed to his feet, ignoring the outrageous stab of pain in his left hip, and made his way back to the solemn figure in the coffin.

He looked at the face again, the grim set of the mouth with its firm chin. A man in his prime all right. And there was hair cleaving to the well-shaped skull beneath the swollen bandages.

He lifted his glass in salute.

"Ramses," he whispered, drawing closer. And then speaking in Latin, he said, 'Welcome to London. Do you know where London is?' He laughed softly at himself speaking Latin to this thing. Then he quoted a few sentences from Caesar's account of his conquest of Britain. "That's where you are, great King," he said. He made a feeble attempt to switch to Greek, but it was simply too hard for him. In Latin, he said: "I hope you like the damn place better than I do."

There was a faint rustling sound suddenly. Where had it come from? How odd to hear it so distinctly when the roar of conversation all around him was such a persistent nuisance. But it sounded as if it had come from the coffin itself, right in front of him.

He scanned the face again. Then the arms and hands, which appeared to be snagged in the rotted linen, as if they might fall loose at any moment. In fact, there was a distinct tear in the dark, dirty cloth, exposing a bit of the undergarment of the body right where the wrists were crossed. Not good. The thing was deteriorating right here before his eyes. Or there were tiny parasites at work. Must be stopped immediately.

He looked down at the mummy's feet. This was alarming. A tiny pile of dust accumulating even as he watched, falling, it seemed, from the twisted right hand, on which the wrappings had been badly broken.

"Good Lord, Julie must send this over to the museum immediately," he whispered. And then he heard that sound again. Rustling? No, it was fainter. Yes, the thing must be properly taken care of. God only knew what the London damp was doing to it. But surely Samir knew this. And so did Hancock.

In Latin, he spoke to the mummy again. "I don't like the damp either, great King. It gives me pain. And that's why I'm going home now, to leave you to your worshippers."

He turned away, leaning heavily on his cane, to ease the ache in his hip. He glanced back only once. And the thing looked so robust. It was as if the Egyptian heat had not dried it out whatsoever.

Daisy looked at the tiny necklace as Henry clasped it at the back of her neck. Her dressing room was packed with flowers, bottles of red wine, champagne cooling in ice, and other offerings, but none from a man as handsome as Henry Stratford.

"Looks funny to me," she said, cocking her head to one side. Thin gold chain and a little trinket with paint on it, or that's what it looked like. "Wherever did you get it?"

"It's worth more than that trash you took off," Henry said, smiling. His speech was thick. He was drunk again. And that meant he would be mean, or very, very sweet. "Now come on, ducky, we're going to Flint's. I feel uncommonly lucky, and there's a hundred pounds burning a hole in my pocket. Get a move on."

"And you mean to say that loony cousin of yours is all alone in that house now with that bloomin' mummy case wide open right there in the parlour?"

"Who the hell cares?" He snatched up the white fox wrap he'd bought for her and put it over her shoulders, and pulled her out of the dressing room and towards the stage door.

Flint's was packed when they got there. She hated the smoke, and the sour smell of drink; but it was always fun to be with him here when he had money and he was excited; and he kissed her now on the cheek as he led her towards the roulette wheel.

"You know the rules. You stand on my left, and only on my left. That's always been lucky."

She nodded. Look at all the fine gentlemen in this room; and the women just loaded with jewels. And she with this silly thing around her neck. It made her anxious.

Julie jumped; what was that sound? She found herself vaguely embarrassed as she stood alone in the shadowy library.

There was no one else here, but she could have sworn she heard another person. Not a step, no. Just all the tiny little sounds of another in the room very near to her.

She looked at the mummy slumbering in its case. In the semi-darkness, it looked as if it were coated with a thin layer of ashes. And what a somber, brooding expression it had. She really hadn't noticed before. It looked for all the world as if it were struggling with a bad dream. She could almost see a crease in the forehead.

Was she glad now that they had not replaced the lid? She wasn't certain. But it was too late. She had sworn not to touch these things herself; and she must get to bed; she was more weary than she'd ever been. Her father's old friends had stayed forever. And then the newspaper people had barged in. What brazen effrontery! The guards had finally forced them out, but

not before they had taken a whole series of pictures of the mummy.

And now the clock was striking one. And there was no one here. So why was she trembling? She went quickly to the front door, and was about to throw the bolt when she remembered Henry. He was supposed to be her chaperon and her protector. Strange that he hadn't spoken a civil word to her since he'd come home. And he certainly had not been in his room upstairs. But nevertheless. . . . She left the door unbolted.

It was bitter cold as he stepped out into the deserted street. He slipped on his gloves quickly.

Shouldn't have slapped her, he thought. But she shouldn't have butted in, damn her. He knew what he was doing. He had doubled his money ten times! If only on that last throw! And then as he argued to sign a note, she'd butted in! "But you mustn't!"

Infuriating, the way they'd looked at him. He knew what he owed. He knew what he was doing. And Sharpies there, that scum. As if he were afraid of Sharpies.

It was Sharpies who stepped out of the alleyway now in front of him. For a moment he wasn't entirely certain. It was so dark, with the fog rolling just

above the ground, but then in the seam of light from the window above, he saw the man's pockmarked face.

"Get out of my way," he said.

"Another streak of bad luck, sir?" Sharpies fell into step beside him. "And the little lady costing you money. She was always expensive, sir, even when she worked for me. And I'm a generous man, you know.'"

"Let me alone, you bloody fool." He stepped up the pace. The street lamp was out up ahead. And there wouldn't be a cab at this hour.

"Not without a little interest on account, sir." Henry stopped. The Cleopatra coin. Would the imbecile realize what it was worth? Suddenly he felt the man's fingers digging into his arm.

"You dare!" He pulled away. Then slowly he removed the coin from his inside coat pocket, held it out in the dim light and raised his eyebrow as he looked at the man, who gathered it out of his palm immediately.

"Ah, now that's a beauty, sir. A real ar . . . kay . . . o . . . logical beauty!" He turned the coin over, as if the inscriptions actually meant something to him. "You pinched it, didn't you, sir? From your uncle's treasure, am I right?"

"Take it or leave it!"

Sharpies made his hand a fist around the coin, like a man doing a magic trick for a child.

"Butter wouldn't melt in your mouth, would h, sir?" He slipped the coin into his pocket. "Was he still lying there, gasping, sir, when you pinched it? Or did you wait till he'd breathed his last?"

"Go to hell."

"This won't cover it, sir. No, sir, not by a long shot, sir. Not what you owe me and Die gentlemen at Flint's, sir."

Henry turned on his heel; he made a small adjustment of his top hat against the driving wind; he began to walk fast towards the corner. He could hear the scrape of Sharples's heels on the pavement behind him. And no one ahead in the misty dark; no one behind, that little seam of light from the door of Flint's no longer visible.

He could hear Sharpies drawing close to him. Into the pocket of his coat he reached. His knife. Slowly he drew it out, opened the blade, and gripped the handle tight.

Suddenly he felt the pressure of Sharpies against his back.

"Seems to me you need a little lesson in paying your debts, sir," the bastard said to him.

Sharples's hand came down on his shoulder; but Henry turned swiftly, forcing his knee against Sharpies and knocking him off balance a step. For the brilliant silk of his vest Henry aimed, where the knife might go in between the ribs, with no impediment. And to his astonishment he felt it sink into the man's chest, and saw the white of Sharples's teeth as he opened his mouth in a dry scream.

"Bloody fool! I told you to leave me alone!" He drew out the knife and stabbed the man again. He heard the silk rip this time, and he stepped back, trembling violently all over.

The man took a few faltering steps. Then he fell down on his knees. Gently he pitched forward, shoulders hunched, and then softly heaved to one side, his body going limp and loose on the pavement.

Henry couldn't see his face in the dark. He saw only the lifeless form sprawled there. The bitter cold of the night paralyzed him. His heart thudded in his ears as it had in the chamber in Egypt when he had gazed down at Lawrence lying dead on the floor.

Well, damn him! He shouldn't have tried that with me! The rage choked him. He could not move his right hand, so cold it was, in spite of the glove, the knife clutched in it. Carefully, he lifted his left hand, and closed the knife and put it away.

He glanced from right to left. Darkness, silence. Only the faraway rumble of a motor car on a distant street. Water dripping somewhere, as if from a broken gutter. And the sky above lightening ever so faintly-the color of slate.

He knelt down in the thinning darkness. He reached out for that gleaming silk again, and careful not to touch the great dark wet spot spreading there, he reached under the lapel of the coat. The man's wallet. Fat, full of money!

He did not even examine the contents. Instead he slipped it in the same pocket with the knife. And then he turned on his heel, lifted his chin and walked off with crisp loud steps. He even began to whistle.

Later, when he was comfortably settled in the back of a cab, he drew the wallet out. Three hundred pounds. Well, that was not bad. But as he stared down at the wad of dirty bills, a panic seized him. It seemed he couldn't speak or move, and when he looked out the little window of the hansom, he saw only the soiled grey sky over the roofs of the dreary tenements, and there seemed nothing he wanted, or could want, or could ever have that would alleviate the hopelessness he felt.

Three hundred pounds. But he had not killed the man for that. Why, who could say he had killed anyone! His uncle Lawrence had died of a stroke in Cairo. And as for Sharpies, a despicable moneylender he had made the acquaintance of in Flint's one evening, well, one of Sharples's confederates had killed him. Sneaked up on him in a dark street and sunk a knife in his ribs.

Of course that's what had happened. Who would connect him to these sordid affairs?

He was Henry Stratford, vice chairman of Stratford Shipping, a member of a distinguished family soon to be connected by marriage to the Earl of Rutherford. No one would dare. . . .

And he would call now on his cousin. Explain that he was a little down on his luck. And she would surely come up with a comfortable sum, three times perhaps what he held in his hand, because she would understand it was only temporary, these losses. And it would be a great relief to make them right.

His cousin, his only sister. Once they had loved each other, Julie and he. Loved each other as only a sister and a brother can. He would remind her. She wouldn't give him any trouble, and then he could rest for a little while.

That was the worst part of it of late. He couldn't rest.

JULIE PADDED softly down the stairs in her slippers, the full folds of her lace peignoir gathered in one hand so that she did not trip, her brown hair in loose waves over her shoulders and down her back.

She saw the sun before she saw anything else, as she entered the library—the great blessed flood of yellow light filling the glass conservatory beyond the open doors, a dazzle amid the ferns, and in the dancing water of the fountain and in the great mesh of green leaves curling beneath the glass ceiling.

Long slanting rays fell on the mask of Ramses the Damned in its shadowy corner, on the dark colours of the Oriental carpet, and on the mummy himself as he stood upright in his open case, the tightly wrapped face and limbs becoming golden in the haze, golden as desert sand at midday.

The room lightened before Julie's eyes. The sun exploded suddenly on the gold Cleopatra coins on their bed of velvet. It shimmered on the smooth marble bust of Cleopatra with its demure, half-lidded gaze. It caught the translucent alabaster of the long row of jars. It gleamed on tiny bits and pieces of old gold throughout the room, and on the gilded titles of the many leather-bound books. It struck the deep-graven name "Lawrence Stratford" written on his velvet-covered diary that lay on the desk.

Julie stood still, feeling the warmth surround her. The dark musty smell was fading. And the mummy, it seemed to move in the brightening light, as if responding to the heat. To sigh almost like a flower opening. What a tantalizing illusion. Of course it had not moved at all; yet it did seem fuller, somehow, its powerful shoulders and arms more rounded, its fingers poised as if alive.

"Ramses . . ." she whispered.

There came that sound again, the sound that had startled her the night before. But no, it wasn't a sound, not really. Just the breath of this great house. Of timbers and plaster in the warmth of the morning. She closed her eyes for a moment. And then Rita's step sounded in the hall. Of course, it had been Rita all along . . . the sound of another very near-heartbeat, breath, the subtle shift of garments in motion.

"Well, miss, I tell you I don't like that thing in the house," Rita said. Was that her feather duster softly brushing the living room furniture?

Julie didn't turn around to look. She looked at the mummy. She approached it now and looked up into its face. Good Lord, she had not really seen it last night. Not as she was seeing it now in this great warm glare. It had been a living breathing man, this thing, locked forever in its cerements.

"I do declare, miss, it gives me the shivers."

"Don't be absurd, Rita. Bring me some coffee, like a good girl." She drew even closer to the thing. After all, there was no one here to stop her. She could touch it if she wished. She listened for Rita's retreat. Heard the kitchen door open and close. Then she did reach out and touch the linen bandages that covered the right arm. Too soft, too fragile. And hot from the sun!

"No, this is not good for you, is it?" she asked, glancing up at the thing's eyes as if it were rude to do otherwise. "But I don't want them to take you away. I 'll miss you when you're no longer here. But I won't let them cut you open. That much, I promise you."

Was that dark brown hair she saw beneath the bandages that surrounded the skull? It seemed there was a great thickness of it there, bound painfully tight to the bones, giving a horrid effect of baldness. But it was the overall spectacle that

really caught her and carried her away now from the details. The thing had a distinct personality, rather like a fine sculpture would have. Tall, broad-shouldered Ramses with his head bowed, and his hands in that attitude of resignation.

The words in the diary came back to her with painful clarity.

"You are immortal, my love," she said. "My father's seen to it. You may curse us for opening your tomb, but thousands will come to see you; thousands will eventually speak your name. You will live forever. ..."

So strange that she was on the verge of tears. Father dead. And this which had meant so much to him. Father in an unmarked grave in Cairo as he had wanted it to be; and Ramses the Damned the toast of London.

Suddenly she was startled by Henry's voice.

' 'You're talking to that damned thing, just the way your father did."

"Good Lord, I didn't know you were here! Where did you come from?"

He stood in the archway between the two drawing rooms, his long serge cape hanging loosely from one shoulder. Unshaven, very likely drunk. And that smile of his. It was chilling.

"I'm supposed to be looking out for you," he said, "remember?"

"Yes, of course. I'm sure you are absolutely delighted."

"Where's the key to the drinks cupboard? It's locked, you know. Why the devil does Oscar do that?'"

' 'Oscar's gone till tomorrow. Perhaps you should have coffee, besides. That would do you the most good."

' 'Would it now, my dear?'" He removed the cape as he walked arrogantly towards her, his eyes sweeping the Egyptian room as if he did not entirely approve of it. ' 'You never let me down, do you?" he asked, and flashed that bitter smile again. "My childhood playmate, my cousin, my little sister! I loathe coffee. I want some port or sherry."

"Well, I have none," she said. "Go on upstairs and sleep it off, why don't you?"

Rita had come to the door, was waiting as if for instructions.

"Coffee for Mr. Stratford, too, please, Rita," Julie said, because he hadn't moved. It was perfectly clear he wasn't going anywhere. He was staring at the mummy, in fact, as if it had startled him. "Did Father really speak to him like that?" she asked. "The way I was doing?"

He didn't immediately answer. He turned away, and moved to inspect the alabaster jars, even his posture slouching and arrogant.

"Yes, talked to it as if it could talk back. And Latin of all things. If you ask me, your father had been sick for some time.

Too many years in the desert heat squandering money on corpses and statues and trinkets and trash."

How his words stung her. So careless, yet so hateful. He paused before one of the jars, with his back to her. In the mirror she saw him scowling down at it.

"It was his money, wasn't it?" she asked. "He made enough for all of us, or so he thought."

He turned around sharply.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Well, you haven't managed yours very well, have you?"

"I've done the best I can. Who are you to judge me?" he asked. Suddenly, with the sunlight harshly illuminating his face, he looked frighteningly vicious.

"And what about the shareholders of Stratford Shipping? Have you done your best for them? Or is that quite beyond my judgment also?"

"Be careful, my girl," he said. He drew close to her. He gave one arrogant glance to the mummy on his left almost as if it were another presence, another full person, and then he turned his shoulder to it a little, and narrowed his eyes as he looked at her. "Father and I are the only family you have left now. You need us more than you think, perhaps. After all, what do you really know about trade or shipping?"

How curious. He had made a good point and then ruined it. She needed them both, but it had nothing to do with trade and shipping. She needed them because they were her blood, and to hell with trade and shipping.

She didn't want him to see the hurt in her. She turned away and looked down the length of the double drawing rooms, towards the pale northern windows on the front of the house, where the morning seemed scarcely to be happening.

"I know how to add two and two, my dear cousin," she said. "And that has put me in a very awkward and painful position."

With relief, she watched Rita enter from the hall, her back bent uncomfortably as she carried the heavy silver coffee service. On the center table of the rear drawing room she set it down, only a few feet from where Julie stood.

"Thank you, dear. That's all for now."

With a pointed glance at the thing in the coffin, Rita was gone. And once again Julie was alone with this exquisitely painful moment. Slowly she turned and saw that her cousin was standing directly in front of Ramses.

"Then I should come right to the point," he said, and he turned around to face her. He reached up and loosened his silk tie, and then pulled it off and stuffed it in his pocket. His gait was almost shambling as he approached her.

"I know what you want," she said. "I know what you and Uncle Randolph both want. And more important, I know what you both need. What Father left you won't begin to cover your debts. Lord, but you've made a mess of things."

"So sanctimonious," Henry said. He stood only a foot from her now, his back to the brightening sun and the mummy. "'The suffragette, the little archaeologist. And now you'll try your hand at business, will you?"

"I'll try," she said coldly. His anger was igniting hers. "What else can I do?" she asked. "Let it all slip through your father's hands! Lord, but I pity you!"

"What are you trying to tell me? " he asked. His breath stank of liquor, and his face was shadowed with coarse unshaven hair. "That you'll ask for our resignations? Is that it?"

"I don't know yet." She turned her back on him. She walked into the front drawing room and opened the small secretaire. She sat down before it, and removed her book of bank drafts. And uncapped the inkwell.

She could hear him pacing behind her as she wrote the cheque.

"Tell me, cousin, does it feel good to have more than you can ever spend, more than you can ever count? And to have done nothing to get it?'"

She turned, her eyes down, and she gave him the cheque. She rose and went to the front window. She lifted the lace curtain and looked out at the street. Please go away, Henry, she thought dully, disconsolately. She didn't want to hurt her uncle. She didn't want to hurt anyone. But what could she do? She'd known for years about Randolph's embezzling. She and her father had discussed it last time she was in Cairo. Of course he had meant to take the situation in hand, always meant. And now it fell to her.

She turned suddenly. The silence made her uneasy. She saw her cousin standing in the Egyptian room. He was staring at her, his eyes cold and seemingly lifeless.

"And when you marry Alex, will you disinherit us as well?"

"For the love of heaven, Henry. Go away and leave me alone."

There was something stunning about his expression, about the sheer hardness of his face. He wasn't young anymore, was he? He looked ancient in his habits and in his guilt and in his self-deception. Have pity, she thought. What can you do to help him? Give him a fortune and it will be gone within a fortnight. She turned round again and looked out into the wintry London street.

Early passersby. The nurse from across the way with the twins in their wicker carriage. An old man hurrying along with a newspaper under his arm. And the guard, the guard from the British Museum, slouching idly on the front steps just beneath her. And down the street, in front of her uncle Randolph's, Sally the parlour maid shaking a rug out the front door because she was sure that no one was awake to see.

Why was there no sound behind her in the double rooms? Why didn't Henry storm out, slamming the front door? Perhaps he had left, but no, she heard a tiny furtive noise suddenly, a spoon touching china. The damned coffee.

"I don't know how it could have come to this," she said, still gazing at the street before her. "Trust funds, salaries, bonuses, you had everything, both of you."

"No, not everything, my dear," he said. "You have everything."

Sound of coffee being poured. For the love of heaven!

"Look, old girl," he said, his voice low and strained. "I don't want this quarrel any more than you do. Come. Sit down. Let's have a cup of coffee together like civilized people."

She couldn't move. The gesture seemed more sinister than his anger.

"Come and have a cup of coffee with me, Julie." Was there any way out of it? She turned, her eyes downcast, and moved towards the table, only looking up when it

seemed unavoidable, to see Henry facing her, the steaming cup in his outstretched hand.

There was something unaccountably odd about this, about the way he was offering it to her, about the peculiarly blank expression on his face.

But this had no more than a second to register. For what she saw behind him caused her to freeze in her tracks. Reason ruled against it, but the evidence of her senses was undeniable.

The mummy was moving. The mummy's right arm was outstretched, the torn wrappings hanging from it, as the being stepped out of its gilded box! The scream froze in her throat.

The tiling was coming towards her-towards Henry, who stood with his back to it-moving with a weak, shuffling gait, that arm outstretched before it, the dust rising from the rotting linen that covered it, a great smell of dust and decay filling the room.

"What the devil's the matter with you!" Henry demanded. But the thing was now directly behind him. The outstretched hand closed on Henry's throat.

Her scream would not break loose. Petrified, she heard only a dry shriek inside her, like the impotent cries of her worst dreams.

Henry turned, hands rising reflexively to protect himself, the coffee cup falling with a clatter to the silver tray. A low roar escaped his lips as he fought the thing strangling him. His fingers clasped at the filthy wrappings; the dust rose in gusts as the creature tore its left arm loose from the bindings, and sought to pinion its victim with both hands.

With an ignominious scream, Henry threw the creature off him, and pitched forward on all fours. In an instant he was on his feet and scrambling across the carpet. He ran through the front room and over the marble tile of the front hall to the door.

Speechless, terrified, Julie stared at the ghastly figure who knelt beside the center table. The thing was panting, struggling for breath. She scarcely heard the front door open or slam shut.

Never in her whole life had there been a moment so devoid of reason. Shivering violently, she backed away in horror from this ragged being, this dead thing that had come to life, and seemed now unable to rise to its feet.

Was it looking at her? Were those eyes glinting through the ragged bandages? Blue eyes? It reached out for her. Her body was caught in a cold involuntary shudder. A wave of dizziness passed over her. Don't faint. Whatever happens, don't faint.

Suddenly it turned away. Quite deliberately it looked towards its coffin, or was it the conservatory with the light pouring through its roof? It lay as if exhausted on the Oriental carpet, and then it reached out as if towards the great flood of morning sun.

She could hear its breathing again. Alive! Dear God, alive! It struggled to move forward, lifting its powerful torso only a little off the carpet and propelling itself with a sluggish movement of its knees.

Out of the shadowy drawing room it crawled inch by inch away from her until suddenly it reached the farthest rays of the sun penetrating the library. There it stopped, and seemed to breathe deeply as if actually breathing not air but

light. It lifted itself a little higher on its elbows, and began to crawl towards the conservatory again with greater speed. The linen bandages trailed from its legs. A path of dust was left on the rug. The bandages on its arms were falling to pieces. Fragments of linen broke loose and appeared to disintegrate in the light.

Without a conscious decision, she moved behind it, keeping a safe distance, yet quite unable to stop herself from following it, from staring as if spellbound at its grim progress through the conservatory doors.

Into the hottest glare of the sun it moved, and suddenly it stopped beside the fountain and rolled over on its back. One hand reached up towards the glass ceiling; the other fell limp on its chest.

Silently, Julie moved into the conservatory. Still trembling uncontrollably, she went closer and closer until she was staring directly down at this thing.

The body was filling out in the sunlight! It was growing ever more robust as she watched! She could hear the sound of the wrappings releasing it. She could see the chest rising and falling with regular breath.

And the face, my God, the face. There were eyes there, great shining blue eyes under the thin wrappings. It reached up suddenly and tore loose the bandages. Yes, large and beautiful blue eyes. With another rip, it tore the bandages from its skull and released a soft mop of brown hair.

Then it rose on its knees with quiet grace and reached down into the fountain with its bandaged hands, scooping up the sparkling water to its lips. It drank and drank the water, with deep sighing gulps. Then it stopped and turned towards her, wiping away more of the thick ashen layer of linen from its face.

A man looking at her! A blue-eyed man with intelligence looking at her!

That scream rose again, but was not released. Only a soft sigh came out of her. Or was it a gasp? She realized she had taken a step backwards. The thing climbed to its feet.

It rose now to its full height and gazed calmly at her, its fingers working almost absently to clear the rest of the rotted bandages from its head as if they were cobwebs. Yes, a full head of dark wavy brown hair. It fell to just below the ears, and came now softly over the forehead. And the eyes evinced fascination as it looked at her. Good Lord, imagine! Fascination as it looked at her.

She was going to faint. She had read about it. She knew what it was, though it had never happened to her. But her legs were literally going out from under her and things were going dim. No. Stop! She couldn't faint with this thing staring at her.

This was the mummy come to life!

She backed into the Egyptian room, legs trembling; her body moist all over, her hands clawing at her face peignoir.

It watched her as if genuinely curious as to what she meant to do. Then it wiped more of the bandages away from its neck and its shoulders and its chest. Its broad naked chest. She closed her eyes, and then opened them slowly. Still there, with those powerful arms, and the dust falling from its lustrous brown hair.

It took a step towards her. She backed away. It took another step. She backed up farther. In fact, she was backing up all the way across the library, and very suddenly she felt the center table of the second drawing room behind her. She felt her hands touch the edge of the silver coffee tray.

With silent, even steps it came towards her-this thing, this beautiful man with the splendid body and the large gentle blue eyes.

Good Lord, are you losing your reason! Never mind that it's handsome! It just tried to strangle Henry! Quickly she darted around the table, groping behind her with outstretched hands as she moved towards the front drawing room doors.

It stopped as it reached the table. It looked down at the silver coffeepot and the overturned cup. It picked up something off the tray. What was it? A wadded handkerchief. Had Henry left it there? Quite unmistakably it pointed to the spilt coffee, and then in a soft, resonant and distinctly masculine voice it spoke:

"Come and have a cup of coffee with me, Julie!" it said.

Perfect British accent! Familiar words! Julie felt a shock course through her. This was no invitation from the thing. Why, it was imitating Henry. Same precise intonation. That's what Henry had said!

It held out the handkerchief, which it had opened. White powder, sparkling as if full of tiny crystals. It pointed to the distant row of alabaster jars. The top was missing from one of the jars! And again it spoke with the same flawless, crisp English accent:

"Drink your coffee, Uncle Lawrence."

A groan escaped her lips. The meaning was unmistakable. She stood there staring, the words echoing in her head. Henry had poisoned her father and this creature had witnessed it. Henry had tried to poison her. With all her spirit she tried to deny it. She tried to find some reason that it could not be so. But she knew it was so. Just as surely as she knew this thing was alive and breathing and occupying space before her, and that it was the immortal Ramses come to life out of those decayed wrappings, standing before her in the drawing room with the sun at its back.

Her legs were going out from under her. No way to prevent it, and the darkness was rising. And as she felt herself slip downwards, she saw the tall figure dart forward, and she felt the strong arms catch her and lift her and hold her quite firmly, so that she felt almost safe.

She opened her eyes, and looked up into its face. No, his face. His beautiful face. She heard Rita scream from the hallway. And the darkness rose again.

"What the hell are you saying!" Randolph was not really fully awake. He struggled out of the tangle of covers, reaching for his crumpled silk robe at the foot of the bed. "You're telling me you left your cousin there alone in that house with this thing!"

"I'm telling you it tried to kill me!" Henry roared like a madman. "That's what I'm telling you! The damned thing got out of the coffin and tried to strangle me with its right hand!"

"Damn it, where are my slippers! She's alone in that house, you fool!"

Barefoot, he ran into the hall and down the stairway, his robe ballooning behind him.

'Hurry, you imbecile!' he shouted to his son, who hesitated at the top of the steps.

She opened her eyes. She was sitting on the sofa, and Rita was clinging to her. Rita was hurting her. Rita was making little whimpering sounds.

And there was the mummy, standing right there. Nothing about it imagined. Not the dark lock of hair fallen down on his smooth broad forehead. Or his deep shadowy blue eyes. He had torn loose more of the rotted stuff that covered him. He was bare to the waist, a god, it seemed at the moment. Especially with that smile. That warm and embracing smile.

His hair seemed to be moving as she looked at it, as if it were growing before her eyes. It was fuller and more lustrous than it had been before she fainted. But what in God's name was she doing, staring at this creature's hair!

He drew a little closer. His bare feet were free of the cumbersome wrappings.

"Julie," he said softly.

"Ramses," she whispered back.

The creature nodded, the smile lengthening. "Ramses!" he said emphatically, and he made her a very subtle bow with his head.

Dear God, she thought, this is not merely a man gifted with beauty; this is the most beautiful man I've ever seen.

In a daze, she forced herself to climb to her feet. Rita clung to her, but she struggled free of Rita, and then the mummy-the man-reached out and took her hand and helped her to stand.

The fingers were warm, dusty. She found herself staring right into his face. Skin like the skin of any other human being, only smoother, perhaps softer, and full of more high color-like that of a man who had been running, the cheeks faintly flushed.

He turned his head sharply. She heard it too. Voices outside; argument. A motor car had pulled up in front of the house.

Rita made an awkward dash to the window as if the mummy were going to stop her.

"It's Scotland Yard, miss, thank God for that."

"No, but this is a disaster! Bolt the door at once."

"But miss!"

"Bolt it. Now."

Rita ran to obey. Julie took Ramses' hand.

"Come with me, upstairs, immediately," she said to him. "Rita, put the lid on that coffin. It weighs almost nothing. Close it up fast and come."

No sooner had Rita slid the bolt than they were knocking and pulling the bell. The shrill clanging from the back of the house startled Ramses. His eyes moved quickly over the ceiling and to the back of the house as though he had heard the sound traveling the wire to the kitchen wall.

Julie tugged him gently but urgently, and to her amazement he followed easily as they made their way up the stairs.

She could hear little cries of distress coming from Rita. But Rita was doing as she had been told. Julie heard the thump as the lid of the coffin slid into place.

And Ramses, he was staring at the wallpaper, at the framed portraits, at the knickknack shelf nestled in the corner at the top of the stairs. He was looking at the stained-glass window. He looked down at the wool carpet with its pattern of feathers and twisted leaves.

The pounding was becoming quite impossible. Julie could hear her uncle Randolph calling her name.

"What shall I do, miss?" Rita called out.

"Come up at once." She looked at Ramses, who was watching her with a strange mixture of patience and amusement. "You look normal," she whispered. "Perfectly normal. Beautiful, but normal." She pulled him on down the hallway. "The bath, Rita!" she shouted as Rita appeared, quivering and tentative, behind him. "Quick. Run the bath."

She brought him on towards the front of the house as Rita hurried past. They had stopped their pounding for a minute. She could hear the grind of a key in the lock. But the bolt, thank God for that! The pounding started again.

Ramses was truly smiling at her now, as if he were about to laugh. He peered into the bedrooms as he passed them. Suddenly he saw the electric chandelier hanging on its dusty chain from the ceiling rose above. The tiny light bulbs looked dull and opaque in the daylight, but they were burning, and he narrowed his eyes to study this, gently resisting her for the first time.

"Later you can see it!" she said in panic. The water was roaring into the tub. The steam was pouring out of the door.

He gave her another decorous little nod with a slight lift of his eyebrows, and followed her into the bath. The shining tile seemed to please him. He turned slowly to the window and stared at the sunlight sparkling in the frosted glass. Gently he examined the latch and then he opened the window, pushing out on the two sides until he could see the rooftops spread out before him and the brilliant morning sky above.

"Rita, Father's clothes," Julie said breathlessly. They were going to break down that door any minute. "Hurry, get his robe, slippers, a shirt, whatever you can lay hands on at once."

Ramses lifted his chin and closed his eyes. He was drinking in the sunlight. Julie could see his hair moving ever so slightly; tiny tendrils at his forehead curling. The hair seemed to grow thicker. It was growing thicker.

Of course. This is what woke him from the dream-filled sleep, she realized. The sun! And he had been too weak to do more than struggle with Henry. He had had to crawl into the sunlight before he could gain his full strength.

There were shouts of "Police" from below. Rita came running with a pair of slippers in her hand, and a pile of clothing over her arm.

"There's reporters out there, miss; a whole crowd of them, and Scotland Yard and your uncle Randolph ..."

"Yes, I know. Go down now and tell them we'll be right there, but don't draw back the bolt!"

Julie took the silk bathrobe and white shirt and put them on the hook. She touched Ramses' shoulder.

He turned and looked at her and the immediate warmth of his smile astonished her.

"Britannia," he said softly, his eyes moving from right to left as though to encompass the spot on which they stood.

"Yes, Britannia!" she said. A sudden lovely giddiness took hold of her. She pointed to the bath. "Lavare!" she said. Didn't that mean wash?

He nodded, his eyes taking in everything around him—the brass taps, the steam billowing up from the deep tub. He looked at the clothing.

' 'For you!' she said, pointing at the robe and then at Ramses. Oh, if only she could remember the Latin. "Vestments," she said desperately.

And then he did laugh. Softly, gently, indulgently. And she found herself petrified again, staring at him, at the smooth shimmering beauty of his face. Lovely even white teeth he had, flawless skin and such an oddly commanding manner as he gazed at her. But then he was Ramses the Great, wasn't he? She was going to faint again if she didn't stop this.

She backed out the door.

' 'Reste!' she said. ' 'Lavare.' She made pleading gestures with both her hands. Then she went to leave, and quite suddenly his powerful right hand closed on her wrist.

Her heart stopped altogether.

"Henry!" he said softly. His face took on an air of menace, but not towards her.

Slowly she caught her breath. She could hear Rita screaming at the men to stop their banging. Someone was shouting back from the street.

"No, don't worry about Henry. Not now. I'll take care of Henry, you can be sure." Oh, but he wouldn't understand this. Again she gestured for his patience, his forbearance, and then she gently removed his hand from her wrist. He nodded, let her go. She backed away again, and then shut the door and ran down the hallway and down the stairs.

"Let me in, Rita!" Randolph was shouting.

Julie almost stumbled on the bottom step. She rushed into the drawing room. The lid was in place on the coffin! Would they see that faint trail of dust on the floor? But no one would believe it! She wouldn't have believed it!

She stopped, closed her eyes, breathed deeply, and then told Rita to go ahead and open the door.

She turned, a rather prim expression fixed on her face, and watched as her uncle Randolph, dishevelled and barefoot, wearing only his dressing gown, came into the room. The museum guard was right behind him, and two gentlemen who appeared to be police in plainclothes, though she did not know precisely why.

"What hi the world is the matter?" she asked. "You woke me from a sound sleep on the sofa. What time is it?" She l