

A King in Babylon

(Continued from preceding page.)

Jimmy which puzzled him!—then he turned away abruptly.

"All right, Billy," he said, and I made the double exposure, just as I had the first time.

Then we did a short scene of four natives carrying away the unconscious Jimmy, while the girl, materializing apparently out of the body of the mummy, sat up and leered after him in triumph—and, heavens, the way she did it! Then, as the sun had grown uncomfortably hot, we went over to the oasis, and gathered up Ma Creel and Mollie, and did two or three fillers with the palms and the native camp as backgrounds; and finally Creel dismissed us with the injunction to be ready at three o'clock in Oriental costume.

I knew that he was going to do the burying-alive scene—the biggest scene of the film, upon which its success would very largely depend—and I soon realized that he was nervous over it, for he actually came and asked me for advice—me, the cameraman!—as I was putting away my box.

"I don't half-like the idea of those natives handling the Princess," he said; "especially in that harem rig. You remember how they looked at her."

"Do they have to handle her?" I asked.

"Well, naturally, there has to be a struggle. She's not going to let herself be put inside that tomb without a fight. Of course, from the picture point of view, the more brutal the fight is the better—I'm afraid it will get too brutal."

"If we had some swords or spears . . ."

But Creel shook his head impatiently.

"That wouldn't do. She'd throw herself on the spears rather than be buried alive. Anybody would! No—she's got to be handled roughly—damn roughly! This is the big scene, and we've got to put it over. What the king would really have done would be to have his men strip her naked, and lash her with whips into the tomb. We can't go that far, of course, but we've got to get as close to it as we dare!"

"You'd better find out how much the Princess will stand for," I suggested.

"Oh, I'm not afraid of that—she's an artist—she'll stand for whatever is necessary. Digby can do most of it, with Mustafa to help. I think we can trust Mustafa. If that isn't enough, I'll have to put on a coat of bronze myself. Come along and let's look over the ground. You don't mind the sun, do you?"

"No," I said; "I seem to be sun-proof," and Creel summoned Digby, and together we walked over to the excavation.

The natives had knocked off work, but Mustafa routed out a couple for us, and under Creel's direction, the entrance to the tomb was squared up, and the stones to fill the opening were piled up neatly close at hand.

"We'll have to have something for mortar," said Creel; "black mortar like that in the wall."

"Sand and water will do," said Digby. "I can darken it with some lamp-black."

"All right," Creel agreed. "You didn't forget those trowels, did you?"

"Sure not," said Digby who never forgot anything.

"There's one place up there where the masonry's broken. You'd better have that repaired, Mustafa, and then have the whole front of the tomb scrubbed off, so that it will look clean and new. And sweep up all this debris. I want it to look as it did four thousand years ago, when it was first built."

"Vurry good, saar," said Mustafa, and sent a native off for brooms and water.

"This stone with the oval in it," Creel added, "will be the last one in—the seal, as it were, closing up the tomb. You want to do some figuring, Digby, so that it will fit in properly. Do you know anything about masonry?"

"I know enough to pull off this job," Digby assured him. "I'll pile up the stones the way they go—it ought to be easy, then."

"That's right," Creel agreed. "And, of course, if you get stuck, we can stop camera. And get your props ready, Digby—we'll want the whole outfit, you know, to make the scene as impressive as possible. And get the sand cleaned off those steps, Mustafa—I want to take one scene there. If we had a strip of carpet . . ."

"I've got one," said Digby. "I put it in on the chance we'd need it."

"Good for you! Lay it

from the steps over to the tomb; and spread some rugs here for the king to stand on. It wouldn't hurt to rig up a square of painted canvas for a shelter."

"All right," said Digby, and hurried away to carry out these multifarious instructions.

"I don't know what I'd do without Digby," said Creel, looking after him. Then he turned back to the tomb. "Come along; let's see what the professor's doing."

I hadn't seen Davis all morning—he had risen ahead of all of us, and had been too busy since to waste any time watching our performance. I knew what he was at, for intermittently I had caught the sound of his chisels chipping at the sarcophagus. Now, as we climbed through the hole, the sound came clearer and louder.

"If he does find a coffin in that thing, he'll have to tear this wall down before he can get it out," Creel remarked, as we squeezed through the narrow passage into the corridor. "Gracious but it's hot in here!" he added, and indeed the atmosphere was more stifling than I had ever felt it. "I don't see how Davis stands it. Look at him, working like a slave . . ."

He was crouched beside the sarcophagus, in a position which must have been acutely uncomfortable, and hammering away at the cement by the light of a torch held by one of the natives. He paused to wipe away the perspiration, as we came in, saw us, and greeted us cheerfully.

"I'll have it open by evening," he said, and showed us where the adamantine cement had been chiselled away for about half the length of the lid. "This is certainly the hardest stuff I ever tackled."

Three natives were helping him, and the impact of their chisels was of steel on steel.

"I'm going to do the burying-alive scene this afternoon," said Creel, "and we'll have to wall up that hole out there for a few minutes; but I guess you won't suffocate."

"No, of course not," Davis agreed. "Go ahead."

"Also I'll have to use about all the natives."

"All right. I can't use them in here," and he bent again to his task.

Creel watched him for a moment curiously.

"You really expect to find a mummy in there?" he asked.

"A mummy—yes—and much more," said Davis,

between blows. "I hope to prove whether the book of Genesis is true or false."

Creel whistled softly.

"Come along, Billy," he said. "We'd better be off about our picayune affairs. This is too big for us!"

Davis answered with a short laugh.

"It is big," he agreed.

"Too big, I suppose," continued Creel, "to permit your stopping for lunch."

"Is it time for lunch?" and Davis looked up in surprise.

"It's almost noon."

Davis straightened his back slowly, laid his hammer and chisel regretfully on top of the sarcophagus, and mopped the sweat from his face.

"I might have guessed it by the heat," he said, and dismissed the natives, who scampered off with an alacrity which showed that they, at least, had not been oblivious to the passage of time and the pangs of hunger. "I didn't realize how tired I was," he added. "This sort of work takes it out of a fellow. It's a mistake to overdo it."

"Yes, it is," agreed Creel; "it's a mistake to overdo anything. You think you'll be ready to open that thing to-night?"

"Yes—there is only four or five hours' more work on it."

"And after that you are going to tear down that door with the 'Keep Out!' sign on it?"

"Yes," and Davis cast an amused glance toward the symbol of warning cut in the farther wall.

Creel hesitated a minute.

"You haven't seen any more ghosts?" he asked at last, in a tone he tried vainly to render merely casual.

"I haven't seen any at all," snapped Davis. "I never saw a ghost—I don't believe in them."

"Neither do I," said Creel slowly. "At least, I didn't think I did—but yesterday . . ."

"Do you really believe someone knocked that torch out of your hand?" Davis demanded.

"Did Billy tell you that?" asked Creel, and cast on me a reproachful glance. "As a matter of fact, I don't know what happened. At the time, I would have sworn that it was knocked out of my hand—and there was an ugly welt across my knuckles to prove it. But I've thought about it a good deal since, and of course it *does* seem absurd. Perhaps I *did* knock my hand against something—though what I could have knocked it against beats me. I was standing right here—you can see for yourself I wasn't within reach of anything . . ."

He stopped suddenly, his eyes on the floor. For Davis, with a sardonic smile, had turned the ray of his torch upon a jagged fragment of stone which lay almost at his feet—a stone which would weigh four or five pounds; and then he pointed his torch toward the roof, and we saw the hole from which the fragment had fallen.

"There's your ghost," he said drily. "No wonder it raised a welt!"

Creel stared at the stone a moment longer; then he stooped and picked it up and weighed it in his hand, and examined its sharp edges. Finally he cast it away into a corner of the tomb.

"No doubt you are right," he agreed; "and I suppose I seem an awful fool to you. Nevertheless there's one thing I want to say, and it is this: I understand in a dim way what you hope to find in this sarcophagus; it's a big thing—a tremendous thing—worth running some risk for . . ."

"What risk?" demanded Davis.

"I don't know; but I feel somehow that there is a risk . . ."

"Rubbish!" Davis broke in. "Even if there were, do you suppose I . . ."

"No, I don't," said Creel; "and I wouldn't ask you to. I'd take it myself. In fact, before you raise the lid, I hope you will invite me to be present."

"All right; I will," Davis agreed. "But what is it you're driving at?"

"What I'm driving at is this," said Creel, speaking with visible effort; "I feel, somehow, that the risk you run in opening this sarcophagus, great as it is, isn't a thousandth part of the risk you'll take if you tear down that door back yonder."

Davis stared at him.

"Nonsense, man!" he cried. "You're not developing a case of nerves, too!"

(Continued on following page.)



"She begged for mercy, the tears streaming down her face, 'Look—I am young—I am beautiful—see this body, so soft and tender—so full of delight—and it is yours—yours.'"