

The Last Egyptian

"I am dragoman," returned the man, proudly, "and my name is known from Cairo to Khartoum." He tossed a cigarette at Sëra, who caught it deftly and put it between her lips. Then he graciously allowed her to obtain a light from his own cigarette.

Meantime, Nephthys, on entering the hut behind Tadros, had walked to the further side of the room and lifted the lid of a rude chest, rough hewn from eucalyptus wood. From this she drew a bundle, afterward closing the lid and spreading the contents of the bundle upon the chest. Then she turned her back to the others, unfastened her dusty black gown, and allowed it to fall to her hips. Over her head she dropped a white tunic, and afterward a robe of coarse gauze covered thickly with cheap spangles. She now stepped out of the black gown and hung it upon a peg. A broad gilt belt was next clasped around her waist—loosely, so as not to confine too close the folds of spangled gauze.

Tadros, during his conversation with Sëra, watched this transformation of his betrothed with satisfaction. When she had twined a vine of artificial flowers in her dark hair, the girl came to him and sat upon his knee. Her feet were still bare, and not very clean; but he did not notice that.

"I will speak to Hatatcha about Kāra," remarked the old woman, inhaling the smoke of her cigarette with evident enjoyment, "and she will tell him to be more careful."

"Hatatcha is dead," said Nephthys.