

The Dream Detective

By SAX ROHMER

A diaphanous person whose nose chronically blushed for the excesses of its owner hovered about the prospective purchaser. This was William, whose exact position in the Klaw establishment was not known, but who apparently acted during his intervals of sobriety as a salesman.

"Good evening," I said. "Is Mr. Morris Klaw at home?"

"He is, sir," he replied, "but he's very busy, sir, I believe, sir." "Tell him Mr. Scaries has called," I said. "The name," he said, "was you thinking of buying that chair, mum, after you've quite done muckin' it about?"

He retired into the cavernous depths of the shop, and I followed him as far as the dimly seen counter.

"Morris Klaw, Morris Klaw! The devil's come for you!"

Thus the invisible parrot hailed my entrance. Indescribable smells, too-like, with the dusty odor of old books and the unclassifiable perfume of half-rotten furniture, assailed my nostrils, and mingling with it was the distinct scent of reptile life. Scuffings and scratches sounded continuously about me, punctuated by squeals. Then came the rumbling voice of Morris Klaw.

"Ah, Mr. Scaries—good evening, Mr. Scaries! It is the Pettigrew mummy, is it not?"

He advanced through the shadows, his massive figure arrayed for travelling in the caped coat, his tenebrous beard untidy as ever, his pince-nez glittering, his high bald brow yellow as that of a Chinaman.

"There has been a second outrage," I said, "at Sothby's."

"So?" said Morris Klaw, with interest. "Another mummy is executed?"

"Yes, Inspector Grimsby has asked us to join him there."

Morris Klaw stooped and from beneath the counter took out his flat-topped brown bowler. From its lining he extracted a cylindrical scent spray and mingled with the less pleasing perfume that of verbenes.

"A cooling Roman custom, Mr. Scaries," he rumbled, "so refreshing when one lives with rats. So it is Mr. Grimsby who is puzzled again? It is Mr. Grimsby who needs the poor old tool to hold the lantern for him, so that he, the clever Grimsby, can pick up the credit out of the darkness! And why not, Mr. Scaries, and why not? It is his business, it is my pleasure."

He raised his voice. "Isis! Isis!"

Out into the light of the fluttering gas lamp, out from that nightmare abode, stepped Isis Klaw—looking more

grotesque than a French fashion plate in an ironmonger's catalogue. She wore a costume of lettuce-green silk, absolutely plain and unrelieved by any ornament, which rendered it the more remarkable. It was cut low at the neck, and at the point of the V, suspended upon a thin gold chain, hung a big one to inspire a painter seeking a model for the Queen of Sheba, but an ultra-modern note was struck by a hat of some black, gauzy material which loudly proclaimed its Paris origin. She greeted me with her wonderful smile.

"What, then," I said, "were you about to go out?"

"When I hear who it is," rumbled Morris Klaw, "I know that we are about to go out, and behind me are ready!"

He placed the quaint bowler on his head and passed through to the front of the shop.

"William," he admonished the ripe-topped salesman, "there is here a small of fourpenny ale. It will be your rule, William. You will close at half-past nine. See that the goat does not get at the Dutch bulbs. They will kill him, that goat—those bulbs, he has for them a passion!"

The three of us entered the waiting cab, and within half an hour we are eyed at the famous auction rooms. The doors were closed and barred, but a constable who was on duty there evidently had orders to admit us.

The thing we had come to see lay upon the table with an electric lamp burning directly over it. The effect was indescribably weird. All about in the shadows fantastic "lots" seemed to leer at us. A famous private collection was to be sold in the morning and a rank of mummies lined one wall, whilst, from another, stony Pharaohs, gods and goddesses scorned us through the gloom. We were a living group in a place of long-dead things. And yellow on the table beneath the white light, with partially unwrapped coils of discolored linen hanging gruesomely from it, lay a headless mummy.

I heard the spurt of Morris Klaw's scent spray behind me, and a faint breath of verbenes stole to my nostrils. "Pah!" came the rumbling voice, "this air is full of deadness!"

"Good evening, Mr. Klaw," said Grimsby, appearing from somewhere out of the gloom. "I am so glad you have come." He bowed to Isis. "How do you do, Miss Klaw?"

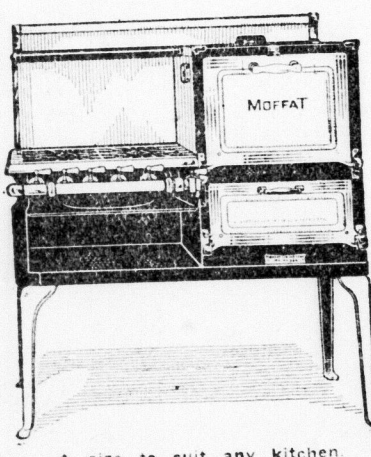
The bright green figure moved forward into the pool of light. I think I

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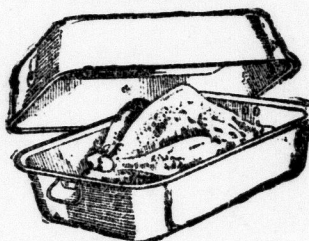
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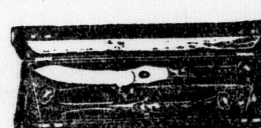
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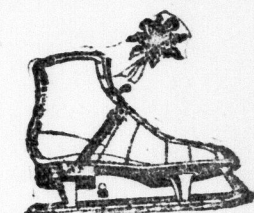
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Ash, 7 feet \$10.00
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Ski Joring Poles \$1.50 each

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Wear-Ever Aluminum articles make pleasing gifts for the home.

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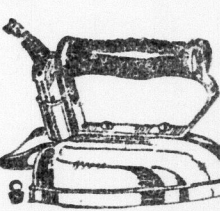


A King Radio Set for Christmas, installed \$160

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had never seen a more singular picture than that of Isis Klaw bending over the decapitated mummy. Indeed, the whole scene would have delighted Rembrandt. This butcher of mummies. In this case I shall rely not upon the odd philosophy, nor upon that great source of the graphic, nor upon that great source of the graphic, but upon my library.

None of us, I am sure, entirely understood his meaning, and following a brief wait, its 1,000-year-old burden, muffledly, the sounds of the traffic in Wellington street came to us as we stood there around that modern relic with its 1,000-year-old burden, Grimsby asked, with hesitancy: "Don't you want to make any investigations, Mr. Klaw?"

Then Morris Klaw started us all. "Name of a dog? I have a thought!" Grabbing his brown bowler, which he had laid on the table beside the headless mummy, "Come, Isis!" he cried, and grasped the girl by the arm. "I have yet another thought, most disturbing," Mr. Scaries, would you be so good as also to come?"

Wondering greatly whence we were bound and upon what errand, I hastened down the room after them, leaving Inspector Grimsby staring blankly. The result of Morris Klaw's inquiry—if inquiry this hasty visit may be termed, was short and to the point. The company of the charming Isis.

The middle-aged gentleman came running to let us out.

"Good night, Inspector Grimsby!" called Morris Klaw.

"Good night! Good night, Miss Klaw!"

"Good night, Mr. Someone who has not been introduced," said Klaw.

"My name is Welby," smiled the other.

"Good night, Mr. Welby!" said Morris Klaw.

III.

During the whole of the journey back to Wapping, Morris Klaw regaled me with anecdotes of travels in the Yucatan Peninsula. I had never met a man before who had ventured fully to explore those deadly swamps; but Morris Klaw chatted about the laanai temples, as unconcerned as another man might chat about the Paris boulevards. Isis took no part in the conversation, from which I gathered that, although she seemed to accompany her father everywhere, she had not accompanied him into the jungles of Yucatan.

"In the heart of those forests, Mr. Scaries," he whispered, "are stranger things than these headless mummies. Do you know that the secret of those great temples buried in the swamps and the jungles and guarded only by serpents and slinky, crawling things, is a door which science has yet to unlock? What people built them, and how they were worshipped, in them? Suppose—the bent to my ear—"I hold the key to that riddle; am I assured to be immortal? Yes? No? Or what? I have a conversation, although it often seemed to be studiously eccentric, was always that of a man of powerful and unique experience. I was rather sorry when we arrived at our destination.

As the cab drew up at the head of the court, I saw the shop of Morris Klaw was in darkness; but again telling the man to wait, we walked down past the warehouse, beyond whose bulk tided muddy Thames, and my eccentric companion producing a key from one of the bulging pockets of his caped coat inserted it into the lock of a door section of a dilapidated boarding.

The door swung open.

"Ah!" he hissed. "It was not locked!"

Klaw struck a match and peered into the odorous darkness.

"William!" he rumbled. "William!" But there was no reply. Isis suddenly laid her hand upon my arm, and it occurred to me that for once her wonderful composure was shaken.

"Something has happened!" she

whispered.

Her father lighted a gas-burner, and the yellow light flared up, reclaiming from the gloom furniture, pictures, cages, glass cases, statuettes, heaps of cheap jewelry and false teeth, books, and a hundred-and-one other items of that weird stock-in-trade.

"Ah! cooche!" muttered Klaw, "beer-swalling pig!"

He stooped to raise the head of the prostrate man, and then to my surprise dropped upon his knees beside him, stooped yet lower, and sniffed suspiciously. Again Isis Klaw seized my arm, and her dark eyes were opened very widely as she leaned forward watching her father. He stood up, holding a glass in his hand which yet contained some drops of what was apparently beer. At this, too, he sniffed. He turned to the gaslight and examined the fluid closely, whilst Isis and I watched him, together. Finally Morris Klaw inserted a long white forefinger into the dirty glass and applied the tip to his tongue.

"Opium!" he said. "Many drops of pure opium were put in this beer!"

He turned to me with a curious expression upon his parchment-colored face.

"Mr. Scaries," he said, "my second idea was a good idea. I shall now surprise you."

CONTINUED TOMORROW.