

"But thou art not a man," I argued. "Thou art but a spirit. Has spirit sex?"

"Look at me," he commanded. I obeyed. His face was pale; his eyes, unusually large and brilliant, seemed to pour a joyous message into mine. I could look no longer, and trembling beneath his gaze, I turned my face away.

"Call it what thou wilt," he said, and a triumphant note throbbed in his voice. "Thou must know that I am a man . . . and young."

Amazed, I demanded to know if spirit had age.

"Nay, thou whose fairness dost rival the whiteness of the lotus blossom, spirit has no age . . . it has eternal youth."

"Then has it been long since thou wert of the living?"

He answered by indicating the vast sweep of silent sands. "Only they remember the greatness of my ancient kingdom. Even thou hast forgotten."

"I?"

"Truly, thou," he repeated, sadly. And once more my eyes fell before his ardent gaze. "But see—perhaps thou canst remember."

A vision spread itself before me. A civilization higher and older than any I had imagined, unrolled there upon the desert. I saw the noble architecture of that ancient city, its solemn halls of worship, its magnificent seats of learning, its voluptuous temples of pleasure. Vividly, in a few moments, I seemed to live close, close to the hearts of its proud and fearless people.

A vast building took shape—a building whose dome was the dark, star-pricked sky. It was thronged with people, and wave upon wave of soundless music filled its dim-lit spaces. I could see the massive marble columns—black—which supported a tracery of delicate carving at their top. I could smell the incense drifting from dull gold censers. And far away, before what appeared to be an altar cut from solid turquoise, and studded extravagantly with glittering gems—before this there stood an aged priest and a fair young couple. The man wore his royal insignia—a crown of gold, from which a jewelled serpent raised its head. The girl by his side.

A cry escaped my lips. I was gazing at myself!

The vision faded. Everything faded. I knew nothing until gradually aroused by the comfort of his presence.

"Beloved," he whispered, enfolding me in a close embrace, "thou were almost mine. Death separated us. As I loved thee then, so I have loved thee all these lonely ages. Tell me, hast thou forgotten, Sweet?"

Confusedly, I tried to answer. I tried to ask why he had not come to me before; why I lived physically and he did not; why we seemed to have escaped from one another through different worlds—he in that, I in this. Clumsily, I put the question: "Dost thou not wish to live?"

"Oh, my beloved, not if thou wilt die!" he said.

One day a peculiar thing happened. Going through the ward, I came upon Sister Dixon painting a patient's wound with iodine. I lingered near a moment to watch her work, when there came to me a faint perfume—The Perfume of Egypt, as it seemed to name itself—illusive, yet distinct. It came from her. I moved closer, only to find that my nose detected nothing other than the pungent smell of iodine. Disturbed, I passed on and tried to forget, but the idea that a delicate, sweet perfume emanated from her, grew firmer.

The boys spoke of it, and I noticed something more . . . there were times when she sat still beside some mangled form that I heard a gentle humming, a medley of divine harmony; not music, exactly, but an indescribable, noiseless sound which did not reach me through my ears. And several times I saw a queer rose light shining about her head. It was like Egyptian moonlight on the desert sands, or like the faint diffusion of sunshine through a crimson parasol; and I saw this thing at night, long after the hot Egyptian sun had set.

Then I tried to avoid the girl. Queer sights and sounds are bad enough at home; out there, strange things lose their strangeness and the brain swings on a less even balance. "Is it true?" someone asks. "Why not?" another replies. "It happened in Egypt."

I was afraid of reaching the point where mad fancies looked sane to me. Dryad Dixon had been on duty all afternoon, and was not supposed to be in the ward until midnight. I went at a quarter of twelve to call her.

(Continued on page 53)



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