

Egyptian Sorcery

by Algernon Blackwood

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Sanfield paused as he was about to leave the Underground station at Victoria, and cursed the weather. When he left the City it was fine; now it was pouring with rain, and he had neither overcoat nor umbrella. Not a taxi was discoverable in the dripping gloom. He would get soaked before he reached his rooms in Sloane Street.

He stood for some minutes, thinking how vile London was in February, and how depressing life was in general. He stood also, in that moment, though he knew it not, upon the edge of a singular adventure. Looking back upon it in later years, he often remembered this particularly wretched moment of a pouring wet February evening, when everything seemed wrong, and Fate had loaded the dice against him, even in the matter of weather and umbrellas.

Fate, however, without betraying her presence, was watching him through the rain and murk; and Fate, that night, had strange, mysterious eyes. Fantastic cards lay up her sleeve. The rain, his weariness and depression, his physical fatigue especially, seemed the conditions she required before she played these curious cards. Something new and wonderful fluttered close. Romance flashed by him across the driving rain and touched his cheek. He was too exasperated to be aware of it.

Things had gone badly that day at the office, where he was junior partner in a small firm of engineers. Threatened trouble at the works had come to a head. A strike seemed imminent. To add to his annoyance, a new client, whose custom was of supreme importance, had just complained bitterly of the delay in the delivery of his machinery. The senior partners had left the matter in Sanfield's hands; he had not succeeded. The angry customer swore he would hold the firm to its contract. They could deliver or pay up—whichever suited them. The junior partner had made a mess of things.

The final words on the telephone still rang in his ears as he stood sheltering under the arcade, watching the downpour, and wondering whether he should make a dash for it or wait on the chance of its clearing up when a further blow was dealt him as the

rain-soaked poster of an evening paper caught his eye: "Riots in Egypt. Heavy Fall in Egyptian Securities," he read with blank dismay. Buying a paper he turned feverishly to the City article—to find his worst fears confirmed. Delta Lands, in which nearly all his small capital was invested, had declined a quarter on the news, and would evidently decline further still. The riots were going on in the towns nearest to their property. Banks had been looted, crops destroyed; the trouble was deep-seated.

So grave was the situation that mere weather seemed suddenly of no account at all. He walked home doggedly in the drenching rain, paying less attention to it than if it had been Scotch mist. The water streamed from his hat, dripped down his back and neck, splashed him with mud and grime from head to foot. He was soaked to the skin. He hardly noticed it. His capital had depreciated by half, at least, and possibly was altogether lost; his position at the office was insecure. How could mere weather matter?

Sitting, eventually, before his fire in dry clothes, after an apology for a dinner he had no heart to eat, he reviewed the situation. He faced a possible total loss of his private capital. Next, the position of his firm caused him grave uneasiness, since, apart from his own mishandling of the new customer, the threatened strike might ruin it completely; a long strain on its limited finances was out of the question. George Sanfield certainly saw things at their worst. He was now thirty-five. A fresh start—the mere idea of it made him shudder—occurred as a possibility in the near future. Vitality, indeed, was at a low ebb, it seemed. Mental depression, great physical fatigue, weariness of life in general made his spirits droop alarmingly, so that almost he felt tired of living. His tie with existence, at any rate, just then was dangerously weak.

Thought turned next to the man on whose advice he had staked his all in Delta Lands. Morris had important Egyptian interests in various big companies and enterprises along the Nile. He had first come to the firm with a letter of introduction upon some business matter, which the junior partner had handled so successfully that acquaintance thus formed had ripened into a more personal tie. The two men had much in common; their temperaments were suited; understanding grew between them; they felt at home and comfortable with one another. They became friends; they felt a mutual confidence. When Morris paid his rare visits to England, they spent

much time together; and it was on one of these occasions that the matter of the Egyptian shares was mentioned, Morris urgently advising their purchase.

Sanfield explained his own position clearly enough, but his friend was so confident and optimistic that the purchase eventually had been made. There had been, moreover, Sanfield now remembered, the flavour of a peculiarly intimate and personal kind about the deal. He had remarked it, with a touch of surprise, at the moment, though really it seemed natural enough. Morris was very earnest, holding his friend's interest at heart; he was affectionate almost.

"I'd like to do you this good turn, old man," he said. "I have the strong feeling, somehow, that I owe you this, though heaven alone knows why!" After a pause he added, half shyly: "It may be one of those old memories we hear about nowadays cropping up out of some previous life together." Before the other could reply, he went on to explain that only three men were in the parent syndicate, the shares being unobtainable. "I'll set some of my own aside for you four thousand or so, if you like."

They laughed together; Sanfield thanked him warmly; the deal was carried out. But the recipient of the favour had wondered a little at the sudden increase of intimacy even while he liked it and responded.

Had he been a fool, he now asked himself, to swallow the advice, putting all his eggs into a single basket? He knew very little about Morris after all.... Yet, while reflection showed him that the advice was honest, and the present riots no fault of the adviser's, he found his thoughts turning in a steady stream towards the man. The affairs of the firm took second place. It was Morris, with his deep-set eyes, his curious ways, his dark skin burnt brick-red by a fierce Eastern sun; it was Morris, looking almost like an Egyptian, who stood before him as he sat thinking gloomily over his dying fire.

He longed to talk with him, to ask him questions, to seek advice. He saw him very vividly against the screen of thought; Morris stood beside him now, gazing out across the limitless expanse of tawny sand. He had in his eyes the "distance" that sailors share with men whose life has been spent amid great trackless wastes. Morris, moreover, now he came to think of it, seemed always a little out of place in England. He had few relatives and, apparently, no friends; he was always intensely pleased when the time came to return to his beloved Nile. He had once

mentioned casually a sister who kept house for him when duty detained him in Cairo, but, even here, he was something of an Oriental, rarely speaking of his women folk. Egypt, however, plainly drew him like a magnet. Resistance involved disturbance in his being, even ill-health. Egypt was "home" to him, and his friend, though he had never been there, felt himself its potent spell.

Another curious trait Sanfield remembered, too—his friend's childish superstition; his belief, or half-belief, in magic and the supernatural. Sanfield, amused, had ascribed it to the long sojourn in a land where anything unusual is at once ascribed to spiritual agencies. Morris owed his entire fortune, if his tale could be believed, to the magical apparition of an unearthly kind in some lonely *wadi* among the Bedouins. A sand-diviner had influenced another successful speculation.... He was a picturesque figure, whichever way one took him: yet a successful business man into the bargain.

These reflections and memories, on the other hand, brought small comfort to the man who had tempted Fate by following his advice. It was only a little strange how Morris now dominated his thoughts, directing them towards himself. Morris was in Egypt at the moment.

He went to bed at length, filled with uneasy misgivings, but for a long time he could not sleep. He tossed restlessly, his mind still running on the subject of his long reflections. He ached with tiredness. He dropped off at last. Then came a nightmare dream, in which the firm's works were sold for nearly nothing to an old Arab sheikh who wished to pay for them—in goats. He woke up in a cold perspiration. He had uneasy thoughts. His fancy was travelling. He could not rest.

To distract his mind, he turned on the light and tried to read, and, eventually, towards morning, fell into a sleep of sheer exhaustion. And his final thought—he knew not exactly why—was a sentence Morris had made use of long ago: "I feel I owe you a good turn; I'd like to do something for you..."

This was the memory in his mind as he slipped off into unconsciousness.

But what happens when the mind is unconscious and the tired body lies submerged in deep sleep, no man, they say, can really tell.

The next thing he knew he was walking along a sun-baked street in some foreign town that was familiar, although, at first, its name escaped him. Colour, softness, and warmth pervaded it; there was sparkle and lightness in the exhilarating air; it was an Eastern town.

Though early morning, a number of people were already stirring; strings of camels passed him, loaded with clover, bales of merchandise, and firewood. Gracefully-draped women went by silently, carrying water jars of burnt clay upon their heads. Rude wooden shutters were being taken down in the bazaars; the smoke of cooking-fires rose in blue spirals through the quiet air. He felt strangely at home and happy. The light, the radiance stirred him. He passed a mosque from which the worshippers came pouring in a stream of colour.

Yet, though an Eastern town, it was not wholly Oriental, for he saw that many of the buildings were of semi-European design, and that the natives sometimes wore European dress, except for the fez upon the head. Among them were Europeans, too. Staring into the faces of the passers-by, he found, to his vexation, that he could not focus sight as usual, and that the nearer he approached, the less clearly he discerned the features. The faces, upon close attention, at once grew shadowy, merged into each other, or, in some odd fashion, melted into the dazzling sunshine that was their background. All his attempts in this direction failed; impatience seized him; of surprise, however, he was not conscious. Yet this mingled vagueness and intensity seemed perfectly natural.

Filled with a stirring curiosity, he made a strong effort to concentrate his attention, only to discover that this vagueness, this difficulty of focus, lay in his own being, too. He wandered on, unaware exactly where he was going, yet not much perturbed, since there was an objective in view, he knew, and this objective must eventually be reached. Its nature, however, for the moment entirely eluded him.

The sense of familiarity, meanwhile, increased; he had been in this town before, although not quite within recoverable memory. It seemed, perhaps, the general atmosphere, rather than the actual streets, he knew; a certain perfume in the air, a tang of indefinable sweetness, a vitality in the radiant sunshine. The dark faces that he could not focus, he yet knew; the flowing garments of blue and red and

yellow, the softly-slippered feet, the slouching camels, the burning human eyes that faded ere he fully caught them—the entire picture in this blazing sunlight lay half-hidden, half-revealed. And an extraordinary sense of happiness and well-being flooded him as he walked; he felt at home; comfort and bliss stole over him. Almost he knew his way about. This was a place he loved and knew.

The complete silence, moreover, did not strike him as peculiar until, suddenly, it: was broken in a startling fashion. He heard his own name spoken. It sounded close beside his ear.

“George Sanfield!” The voice was familiar. Morris called him. He realized then the truth. He was, of course, in Cairo.

Yet, instead of turning to discover the speaker at his side, he hurried forward, as though he knew that the voice had come through distance. His consciousness cleared and lightened; he felt more alive; his eyes now focused the passers-by without difficulty. He was there to find Morris, and Morris was directing him. All was explained and natural again. He hastened. But, even while he hastened, he knew that his personal desire to speak with his friend about Egyptian shares and Delta Lands was not his single object. Behind it, further in among as yet unstirring shadows, lay another deeper purpose. Yet he did not trouble about it, nor make a conscious effort at discovery. Morris was doing him that “good turn I feel I owe you.” This conviction filled him overwhelmingly. The question of how and why did not once occur to him. A strange, great happiness rose in him.

Upon the outskirts of the town now, he found him-self approaching a large building in the European style, with wide verandas and a cultivated garden filled with palm trees. A well-kept drive of yellow sand led to its chief entrance, and the man in khaki drill and riding-breeches walking along this drive, not ten yards in front of him, was—Morris. He overtook him, but his cry of welcome recognition was not answered. Morris, walking with bowed head and stooping shoulders, seemed intensely preoccupied; he had not heard the call.

“Here I am, old fellow!” exclaimed his friend, holding out a hand. “I’ve come, you see...!” then paused aghast before the altered face. Morris paid no attention. He walked straight on as though he had not heard. It was the distraught and anguished expression on the drawn and haggard features that

impressed the other most. The silence he took without surprise.

It was the pain and suffering in his friend that occupied him. The dark rims beneath heavy eyes, the evidence of sleepless nights, of long anxiety and ceaseless dread, afflicted him with their too-plain story. The man was overwhelmed with some great sorrow. Sanfield forgot his personal trouble; this larger, deeper grief usurped its place entirely.

"Morris! Morris!" he cried yet more eagerly than before. "I've come, you see. Tell me what's the matter. I believe—that I can—help you...!"

The other turned, looking past him through the air. He made no answer. The eyes went through him. He walked straight on, and Sanfield walked at his side in silence. Through the large door they passed together, Morris paying as little attention to him as though he were not there, and in the small chamber they now entered, evidently a waiting-room, an Egyptian servant approached, uttered some inaudible words, and then withdrew, leaving them alone together.

It seemed that time leaped forward, yet stood still; the passage of minutes, that is to say, was irregular, almost fanciful. Whether the interval was long or short, however, Morris spent it pacing up and down the little room, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his mind oblivious of all else but his absorbing anxiety and grief. To his friend, who watched him by the wall with intense desire to help, he paid no attention. The latter's spoken words went by him, entirely unnoticed; he gave no sign of seeing him; his eyes, as he paced up and down, muttering inaudibly to himself, were fixed every few seconds on an inner door. Beyond that door, Sanfield now divined, lay someone who hesitated on the narrow frontier between life and death.

It opened suddenly and a man, in overall and rubber gloves, came out, his face grave yet with faint signs of hope about it—a doctor, clearly, straight from the operating table. Morris, standing rigid in his tracks, listened to something spoken, for the lips were in movement, though no words were audible. The operation, Sanfield divined, had been successful, though danger was still present. The two men passed out, then, into the hall and climbed a wide staircase to the floor above, Sanfield following noiselessly, though so close that he could touch them. Entering a large, airy room where French windows, carefully shaded with green blinds opened on to a veranda,

they approached a bed. Two nurses bent over it. The occupant was at first invisible.

Events had moved with curious rapidity. All this had happened, it seemed, in a single moment, yet with the irregular effect already mentioned which made Sanfield feel it might, equally, have lasted hours. But, as he stood behind Morris and the surgeon at the bed, the deeps in him opened suddenly, and he trembled under a shock of intense emotion that he could not understand. As with a stroke of lightning some heavenly fire set his heart aflame with yearning. The very soul in him broke loose with passionate longing that *must* find satisfaction. It came to him in a single instant with the certain knowledge of an unconquerable conviction. Hidden, yet ever waiting, among the broken centuries, there now leaped upon him this flash of memory the memory of some sweet and ancient love Time might veil yet could not kill.

He ran forward, past the surgeon and the nurses, past Morris who bent above the bed with a face ghastly from anxiety. He gazed down upon the fair girl lying there, her unbound hair streaming over the pillow. He saw, and he remembered. And an uncontrollable cry of recognition left his lips....

The irregularity of the passing minutes became somarked then, that he might well have passed outside their measure altogether, beyond what men call Time; duration, interval, both escaped. Alone and free with his eternal love, he was safe from all confinement, free, it seemed, either of time or space. His friend, however, was vaguely with him during the amazing instant. He felt acutely aware of the need each had, respectively, for the other, born of a heritage the Past had hidden overlong. Each, it was clear, could do the other a good turn.... Sanfield, though unable to describe or disentangle later, knew, while it lasted, this joy of full, delicious understanding....

The strange, swift instant of recognition passed and disappeared. The cry, Sanfield realized, on coming back to the Present, had been soundless and inaudible as before.

No one observed him; no one stirred. The girl, on that bed beside the opened windows, lay evidently dying. Her breath came in gasps, her chest heaved convulsively, each attempt at recovery was slower and more painful than the one before. She was unconscious. Sometimes her breathing seemed to stop. It grew weaker, as the pulse grew fainter. And Sanfield, transfixed as with paralysis, stood watching,

waiting, an intolerable yearning in his heart to help. It seemed to him that he waited with a purpose.

This purpose suddenly became clear. He knew why he waited. There was help to be given. He was the one to give it.

The girl's vitality and ebbing nerves, her entire physical organism now fading so quickly towards that final extinction which meant death—could these but be stimulated by a new tide of life, the danger-point now fast approaching might be passed, and recovery must follow. This impetus, he knew suddenly, he could supply. How, he could not tell. It flashed upon him from beyond the stars, as from ancient store of long-forgotten, long-neglected knowledge. It was enough that he felt confident and sure. His soul burned within him; the strength of an ancient and unconquerable love rose through his being. He would try.

The doctor, he saw, was in the act of giving his last aid in the form of a hypodermic injection, Morris and the nurses looking on. Sanfield observed the sharp quick rally, only too faint, too slight; he saw the collapse that followed. The doctor, shrugging his shoulders, turned with a look that could not express itself in words, and Morris, burying his face in his hands, knelt by the bed, shaken with convulsive sobbing. It was the end.

In which moment, precisely, the strange paralysis that had bound Sanfield momentarily, was lifted from his being, and an impelling force, obeying his immense desire, invaded him. He knew how to act. His will, taught long ago, yet long-forgotten, was set free.

"You have come back to me at last," he cried in his anguish and his power, though the voice was, as ever, inaudible and soundless, "*I shall not let you go!* ..."

Drawn forward nearer and nearer to the bed, he leaned down, as if to kiss the pale lips and streaming hair. But his knowledge operated better than he knew. In the tremendous grip of that power which spins the stars and suns, while drawing souls into manifestation upon a dozen planets, he raced, he dived, he plunged, helpless, yet driven by the creative stress of love and sacrifice towards some eternal purpose. Caught in what seemed a vortex of amazing force, he sank away, as a straw is caught and sunk within the suction of a mighty whirlpool. His memory of Morris, of the doctor, of the girl herself, passed utterly. His entire personality became merged,

lost, obliterated. He was aware of nothing; not even aware of nothingness. He lost consciousness....

3

The reappearance was as sudden as the obliteration. He emerged. There had been interval, duration, time. He was not aware of them. A spasm of blinding pain shot through him. He opened his eyes. His whole body was a single devouring pain. He felt cramped, confined, uncomfortable. He must escape. He thrashed about. Someone seized his arm and held it. With a snarl he easily wrenched it free.

He was in bed. How had he come to this? An accident? He saw the faces of nurse and doctor bending over him, eager, amazed, surprised, a trifle frightened.

Vague memories floated to him. Who was he? Where had he come from? And where was...where was...someone...who was dearer to him than life itself? He looked about him: the room, the faces, the French windows, the veranda, all seemed only half familiar. He looked, he searched for...someone...but in vain....

A spasm of violent pain burned through his body like a fire, and he shut his eyes. He groaned. A voice sounded just above him: "Take this, dear. Try and swallow a little. It will relieve you. Your brother will be back in a moment. You are much better already."

He looked up at the nurse; he drank what she gave him.

"My brother!" he murmured. "I don't understand. I have no brother." Thirst came over him; he drained the glass. The nurse, wearing a startled look, moved away. He watched her go. He pointed at her with his hand, meaning to say something that he instantly forgot—as he saw his own bare arm. Its dreadful thinness shocked him. He must have been ill for months. The arm, wasted almost to nothing, showed the bone. He sank back exhausted, the sleeping draught began to take effect. The nurse returned quietly to a chair beside the bed, from which she watched him without ceasing as the long minutes passed....

He found it difficult to collect his thoughts, to keep them in his mind when caught. There floated before him a series of odd scenes like coloured pictures in an endless flow. He was unable to catch them. Morris was with him always. They were doing quite absurd, impossible things. They rode together across the desert in the dawn, they wandered

through old massive temples, they saw the sun set behind mud villages mid wavering palms, they drifted down a river in a sailing boat of quaint design. It had an enormous single sail. Together they visited tombs cut in the solid rock, hot airless corridors, and huge, dim, vaulted chambers underground. There was an icy wind by night, fierce burning sun by day. They watched vast troops of stars pass down a stupendous sky.... They knew delight and tasted wonder. Strange memories touched them....

"Nurse!" he called aloud, returning to himself again, and remembering that he must speak with his friend about something he failed to recall exactly what. "Please ask Mr. Morris to come to me."

"At once, dear. He's only in the next room waiting for you to wake." She went out quickly, and he heard her voice in the passage. It sank to a whisper as she came back with Morris, yet every syllable reached him distinctly:

"... and pay no attention if she wanders a little; just ignore it. She's turned the corner, thank God, and that's the chief thing." Each word he heard with wonder and perplexity, with increasing irritability too.

"I'm a hell of a wreck," he said, as Morris came, beaming, to the bedside. "Have I been ill long? It's frightfully decent of you to come, old man."

But Morris, staggered at this greeting, stopped abruptly, half turning to the nurse for guidance. He seemed unable to find words. Sanfield was extremely annoyed; he showed his feeling. "I'm *not* balmy, you old ass!" he shouted. "I'm all right again, though very weak. But I wanted to ask you oh, I remember now I wanted to ask you about my—er—*Deltas*."

"My poor dear Maggie," stammered Morris, fumbling with his voice. "Don't worry about your few shares, darling. *Deltas* are all right—it's *you* we—"

"Why, the devil, do you call me Maggie?" snapped the other viciously. "And 'darling'!" He felt furious, exasperated. "Have you gone balmy, or have I? What in the world are you two up to?" His fury tired him. He lay back upon his pillows, fuming. Morris took a chair beside the bed; he put a hand gently on his wasted arm.

"My darling girl," he said, in what was intended to be a soothing voice, though it stirred the sick man again to fury beyond expression, "you must really keep quiet for a bit. You've had a very severe operation"—his voice shook a little—"but, thank God, you've pulled through and are now on the way

to recovery. You are my sister Maggie. It will all come back to you when you're rested—"

"Maggie, indeed!" interrupted the other, trying to sit up again, but too weak to compass it. "Your sister! You bally idiot! Don't you know me? I wish to God the nurse wouldn't 'dear' me in that senseless way. And you, with your atrocious 'darling.' I'm not your precious sister Maggie. I'm—I'm George San—"

But even as he said it, there passed over him some dim lost fragment of a wild, delicious memory he could not seize. Intense pleasure lay in it, could he but recover it. He knew a sweet, forgotten joy. His broken, troubled mind lay searching frantically but without success. It dazzled him. It shook him with an indescribable emotion—of joy, of wonder, of deep sweet confusion. A rapt happiness rose in him, yet pain, like a black awful shutter, closed in upon the happiness at once. He remembered a girl. But he remembered, too, that he had seen her die. Who was she? Had he lost her ... again ...!

"My dear fellow," he faltered in a weaker voice to Morris, "my brain's in a whirl. I'm sorry. I suppose I've had some blasted concussion haven't I?"

But the man beside his bed, he saw, was startled. An extraordinary look came into his face, though he tried to hide it with a smile.

"My shares!" cried Sanfield, with a half scream. "Four thousand of them!"

Whereupon Morris blanched. "George Sanfield!" he muttered, half to himself, half to the nurse who hurried up. "That voice! The very number too!" He looked white and terrified, as if he had seen a ghost. A whispered colloquy ensued between him and the nurse. It was inaudible.

"Now, dearest Maggie," he said at length, making evidently a tremendous effort, "do try and lie quiet for a bit. Don't bother about George Sanfield, my London friend. His shares are quite safe. You've heard me speak of him. It's all right, my darling, quite all right. Oh, believe me! I'm your brother."

"Maggie... !" whispered the man to himself upon the bed, whereupon Morris stooped, and, to his intense horror, kissed him on the cheek. But his horror seemed merged at once in another personality that surged through and over his entire being, drowning memory and recognition hopelessly. "Darling," he murmured. He realized that he was mad, of course. It seemed he fainted....

The momentary unconsciousness soon passed, at any rate. He opened his eyes again. He saw a palm tree out of the window. He knew positively he was

not mad, whatever else he might be. Dead perhaps? He felt the sheets, the mattress, the skin upon Ms face. No, he was alive all right. The dull pains where the tight bandages oppressed him were also real. He was among substantial, earthly things. The nurse, he noticed, regarded him anxiously. She was a pleasant-looking young woman. He smiled; and, with an expression of affectionate, even tender pleasure, she smiled back at him.

"You feel better now, a little stronger," she said softly. "You've had a sleep, Miss Margaret." She said "Miss Margaret" with a conscious effort. It was better, perhaps, than "dear"; but his anger rose at once. He was too tired, however, to express his feelings. There stole over him, besides, the afflicting consciousness of an alien personality that was familiar, and yet not his. It strove to dominate him. Only by a great effort could he continue to think his own thoughts. This other being kept trying to intrude, to oust him, to take full possession. It resented his presence with a kind of violence.

He sighed. So strong was the feeling of another personality trying to foist itself upon his own, upon his mind, his body, even upon his very face, that he turned instinctively to the nurse, though unaware exactly what he meant to ask her for.

"My hand-glass, please," he heard himself saying—with horror. The phrase was not his own. Glass or mirror were the words *he* would have used.

A moment later he was staring with acute and ghastly terror at a reflection that was not his own. It was the face of the dead girl he saw within the silver-handled, woman's hand-glass he held up.

* * *

The dream with its amazing, vivid detail haunted him for days, even coming between him and his work. It seemed far more real, more vivid than the commonplace events of life that followed. The occurrences of the day were pale compared to its overpowering intensity. And a cable, received the very next afternoon, increased this sense of actual truth—of something that had really happened.

"Hold shares writing Morris."

Its brevity added a convincing touch. He was aware of Egypt even in Throgmorton Street. Yet it was the face of the dead, or dying, girl that chiefly haunted him. She remained in his thoughts, alive and sweet and exquisite. Without her he felt incomplete, his life a failure. He thought of nothing else.

The affairs at the office, meanwhile, went well; unexpected success attended them; there was no strike; the angry customer was pacified. And when the promised letter came from Morris, Sanfield's hands trembled so violently that he could hardly tear it open. Nor could he read it calmly. The assurance about his precious shares scarcely interested him. It was the final paragraph that set his heart beating against his ribs as though a hammer lay inside him:

"...I've had great trouble and anxiety, though, thank God, the danger is over now. I forget if I ever mentioned my sister, Margaret, to you. She keeps house for me in Cairo, when I'm there. She is my only tie in life. Well, a severe operation she had to undergo, all but finished her. To tell you the truth, she very nearly died, for the doctor gave her up. You'll smile when I tell you that odd things happened—at the very last moment. I can't explain it, nor can the doctor. It rather terrified me. But at the very moment when we thought her gone, something revived in her. She became full of unexpected life and vigour. She was even violent whereas, a moment before, she had not the strength to speak, much less to move. It was rather wonderful, but it was terrible too.

"You don't believe in these things, I know, but I must tell you, because, when she recovered consciousness, she began to babble about yourself, using your name, though she has rarely, if ever, heard it, and even speaking—you won't believe this, of course!—of your shares in Deltas, giving the *exact* number that you hold. When you write, please tell me if you were very anxious about these? Also, whether your thoughts were directed particularly to *me*? I thought a good deal about you, knowing you might be uneasy, but my mind was pretty full, as you will understand, of her operation at the time. The climax, when all this happened, was about 11 a.m. on February 13th.

"Don't fail to tell me this, as I'm particularly interested in what you may have to say.

"And, now, I want to ask a great favour of you. The doctor forbids Margaret to stay here during the hot weather, so I'm sending her home to some cousins in Yorkshire, as soon as she is fit to travel. It would be most awfully kind—I know how women bore you—if you could manage to meet the boat and help her on her way through London. I'll let you know dates and particulars later, when I hear that you will do this for me..."

Sanfield hardly read the remainder of the letter, which dealt with shares and business matters. But a month later he stood on the dock-pier at Tilbury, watching the approach of the tender from the *Egyptian Mail*.

He saw it make fast; he saw the stream of passengers pour down the gangway; and he saw among them the tall, fair woman of his dream. With a beating heart he went to meet her ...

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