

CHAPTER XI

OF THE TOMB OF THE DIVINE MENKAU-RA; OF THE WRITING ON THE BREAST OF MENKAU-RA; OF THE DRAWING FORTH OF THE TREASURE; OF THE DWELLER IN THE TOMB; AND OF THE FLIGHT OF CLEOPATRA AND HARMACHIS FROM THE HOLY PLACE

We stood within a small arched chamber, paved and lined with great blocks of the granite stone of Syene. There before us--hewn from a single mass of basalt shaped like a wooden house and resting on a sphinx with a face of gold--was the sarcophagus of the Divine Menkau-ra.

We stood and gazed in awe, for the weight of the silence and the solemnity of that holy place seemed to crush us. Above us, cubit over cubit in its mighty measure, the pyramid towered up to heaven and was kissed of the night air. But we were deep in the bowels of the rock beneath its base. We were alone with the dead, whose rest we were about to break; and no sound of the murmuring air, and no sight of life came to dull the awful edge of solitude. I gazed on the sarcophagus; its heavy lid had been lifted and rested at its side, and around it the dust of ages had gathered thick.

"See," I whispered, pointing to a writing, daubed with pigment upon the wall in the sacred symbols of ancient times.

"Read it, Harmachis," answered Cleopatra, in the same low voice; "for I cannot."

Then I read: "I, Rameses Mi-amen, in my day and in my hour of need, visited this sepulchre. But, though great my need and bold my heart, I dared not face the curse of Menkau-ra. Judge, O thou who shalt come after me, and, if thy soul is pure and Khem be utterly distressed, take thou that which I have left."

"Where, then, is the treasure?" she whispered. "Is that Sphinx-face of gold?"

"Even there," I answered, pointing to the sarcophagus. "Draw near and see."

And she took my hand and drew near.

The cover was off, but the painted coffin of the Pharaoh lay in the depths of the sarcophagus. We climbed the Sphinx, then I blew the dust from the coffin with my breath and read that which was written on its lid. And this was written:

"Pharaoh Menkau-ra, the Child of Heaven.

"Pharaoh Menkau-ra, Royal Son of the Sun.

"Pharaoh Menkau-ra, who didst lie beneath the heart of Nout.

"Nout, thy Mother, wraps thee in the spell of Her holy name.

"The name of thy Mother, Nout, is the mystery of Heaven.

"Nout, thy Mother, gathers thee to the number of the Gods.

"Nout, thy Mother, breathes on thy foes and utterly destroys them.

"O Pharaoh Menkau-ra, who livest for ever!"

"Where, then, is the treasure?" she asked again. "Here, indeed, is the body of the Divine Menkau-ra; but the flesh even of Pharaohs is not gold, and if the face of this Sphinx be gold how may we move it?"

For answer I bade her stand upon the Sphinx and grasp the upper part of the coffin while I grasped its foot. Then, at my word, we lifted, and the lid of the case, which was not fixed, came away, and we set it upon the floor. And there in the case was the mummy of Pharaoh, as it had been laid three thousand years before. It was a large mummy, and somewhat ungainly. Nor was it adorned with a gilded mask, as is the fashion of our day, for the head was wrapped in clothes yellow with age, which were made fast with pink flaxen bandages, under which were pushed the stems of lotus-blooms. And on the breast, wreathed round with lotus-flowers, lay a large plate of gold closely written over with sacred writing. I lifted up the plate, and, holding it to the light, I read:

"I, Menkau-ra, the Osirian, aforetime Pharaoh of the Land of Khem, who in my day did live justly and ever walked in the path marked for my feet

by the decree of the Invisible, who was the beginning and is the end, speak from my tomb to those who after me shall for an hour sit upon my Throne. Behold, I, Menkau-ra, the Osirian, having in the days of my life been warned of a dream that a time will come when Khem shall fear to fall into the hands of strangers, and her monarch shall have great need of treasure wherewith to furnish armies to drive the barbarian back, have out of my wisdom done this thing. For it having pleased the protecting Gods to give me wealth beyond any Pharaoh who has been since the days of Horus--thousands of cattle and geese, thousands of calves and asses, thousands of measures of corn, and hundreds of measures of gold and gems; this wealth I have used sparingly, and that which remains I have bartered for precious stones--even for emeralds, the most beautiful and largest that are in the world. These stones, then, I have stored up against that day of the need of Khem. But because as there have been, so there shall be, those who do wickedly on the earth, and who, in the lust of gain, might seize this wealth that I have stored, and put it to their uses; behold, thou Unborn One, who in the fulness of time shalt stand above me and read this that I have caused to be written, I have stored the treasure thus--even among my bones. Therefore, O thou Unborn One, sleeping in the womb of Nout, I say this to thee! If thou indeed hast need of riches to save Khem from the foes of Khem, fear not and delay not, but tear me, the Osirian, from my tomb, loose my wrappings and rip the treasure from my breast, and all shall be well with thee; for this only I do command, that thou dost replace my bones within my hollow coffin. But if the need be passing and not great, or if there be guile in thy heart, then the curse of Menkau-ra be on thee! On thee be the curse that shall smite him who breaks in upon the

dead! On thee be the curse that follows the traitor! On thee be the curse that smites him who outrages the Majesty of the Gods! Unhappy shalt thou live, in blood and misery shalt thou die, and in misery shalt thou be tormented for ever and for ever! For, Wicked One, there in Amenti we shall come face to face!

"And to the end of the keeping of this secret, I, Menkau-ra, have set up a Temple of my Worship, which I have built upon the eastern side of this my House of Death. It shall be made known from time to time to the Hereditary High Priest of this my Temple. And if any High Priest that shall be do reveal this secret to another than the Pharaoh, or Her who wears the Pharaoh's crown and is seated upon the throne of Khem, accursed be he also. Thus have I, Menkau-ra, the Osirian, written. Now to thee, who, sleeping in the womb of Nout, yet shall upon a time stand over me and read, I say, judge thou! and if thou judgest evilly, on thee shall fall this the curse of Menkau-ra from which there is no escape. Greeting and farewell."

"Thou hast heard, O Cleopatra," I said solemnly; "now search thy heart; judge thou, and for thine own sake judge justly."

She bent her head in thought.

"I fear to do this thing," she said presently. "Let us hence."

"It is well," I said, with a lightening of the heart, and bent down to lift the wooden lid. For I, too, feared.

"And yet, what said the writing of the Divine Menkau-ra?--it was emeralds, was it not? And emeralds are now so rare and hard to come by. Ever did I love emeralds, and I can never find them without a flaw."

"It is not a matter of what thou dost love, Cleopatra," I said; "it is a matter of the need of Khem and of the secret meaning of thy heart, which thou alone canst know."

"Ay, surely, Harmachis; surely! And is not the need of Egypt great? There is no gold in the treasury, and how can I defy the Roman if I have no gold? And have I not sworn to thee that I will wed thee and defy the Roman; and do I not swear it again--yes, even in this solemn hour, with my hand upon dead Pharaoh's heart? Why, here is that occasion of which the Divine Menkau-ra dreamed. Thou seest it is so, for else Hat-shepsu or Rameses or some other Pharaoh had drawn forth the gems. But no; they left them to come to this hour because the time was not yet come. Now it must be come, for if I take not the gems the Roman will surely seize on Egypt, and then there will be no Pharaoh to whom the secret may be told. Nay, let us away with fears and to the work. Why dost look so frightened? Having pure hearts, there is naught to fear, Harmachis."

"Even as thou wilt," I said again; "it is for thee to judge, since if thou judgest falsely on thee will surely fall the curse from which there is no escape."

"So, Harmachis, take Pharaoh's head and I will take his----Oh, what an

awful place is this!" and suddenly she clung to me. "Methought I saw a shadow yonder in the darkness! Methought that it moved toward us and then straightway vanished! Let us be going! Didst thou see naught?"

"I saw nothing, Cleopatra; but mayhap it was the Spirit of the Divine Menkau-ra, for the spirit ever hovers round its mortal tenement. Let us, then, be going; I shall be right glad to go."

She made as though to start, then turned back again and spoke once more.

"It was naught--naught but the mind that, in such a house of Horror, bodies forth those shadowy forms of fear it dreads to see. Nay, I must look upon these emeralds; indeed, if I die, I must look! Come--to the work!" and stooping, she with her own hands lifted from the tomb one of the four alabaster jars, each sealed with the graven likeness of the heads of the protecting Gods, that held the holy heart and entrails of the Divine Menkau-ra. But nothing was found in these jars, save only what should be there.

Then together we mounted on the Sphinx, and with toil drew forth the body of the Divine Pharaoh, laying it on the ground. Now Cleopatra took my dagger, and with it cut loose the bandages which held the wrappings in their place, and the lotus-flowers that had been set in them by loving hands, three thousand years before, fell down upon the pavement. Then we searched and found the end of the outer bandage, which was fixed in at the hinder part of the neck. This we cut loose, for it was glued fast. This done, we began to unroll the wrappings of the holy corpse.

Setting my shoulders against the sarcophagus, I sat upon the rocky floor, the body resting on my knees, and, as I turned it, Cleopatra unwound the cloths; and awesome was the task. Presently something fell out; it was the sceptre of the Pharaoh, fashioned of gold, and at its end was a pomegranate cut from a single emerald.

Cleopatra seized the sceptre and gazed on it in silence. Then once more we went on with our dread business. And ever as we unwound, other ornaments of gold, such as are buried with Pharaohs, fell from the wrappings--collars and bracelets, models of sistras, an inlaid axe, and an image of the holy Osiris and of the holy Khem. At length all the bandages were unwound, and beneath we found a covering of coarsest linen; for in those very ancient days the craftsmen were not so skilled in matters pertaining to the embalming of the body as they are now. And on the linen was written in an oval, "Menkau-ra, Royal Son of the Sun." We could in no wise loosen this linen, it held so firm on to the body. Therefore, faint with the great heat, choked with mummy dust and the odour of spices, and trembling with fear of our unholy task, wrought in that most lonesome and holy place, we laid the body down, and ripped away the last covering with the knife. First we cleared Pharaoh's head, and now the face that no man had gazed on for three thousand years was open to our view. It was a great face, with a bold brow, yet crowned with the royal uræus, beneath which the white locks, stained yellow by the spices, fell in long, straight wisps. Not the cold stamp of death, and not the slow flight of three thousand years, had found power to mar the dignity of those shrunken features. We gazed on them, and then, made bold with fear, stripped the covering from the body. There at last it

lay before us, stiff, yellow, and dread to see; and on the left side, above the thigh, was the cut through which the embalmers had done their work, but it was sewn up so deftly that we could scarcely find the mark.

"The gems are within," I whispered, for I felt that the body was very heavy. "Now, if thy heart fail thee not, thou must make an entry to this poor house of clay that once was Pharaoh," and I gave her the dagger--the same dagger which had drunk the life of Paulus.

"It is too late to doubt," she answered, lifting her white beautiful face and fixing her blue eyes all big with terror upon my own. She took the dagger, and with set teeth the Queen of this day plunged it into the dead breast of the Pharaoh of three thousand years ago. And even as she did so there came a groaning sound from the opening to the shaft where we had left the eunuch! We leapt to our feet, but heard no more, and the lamp-light still streamed down through the opening.

"It is nothing," I said. "Let us make an end."

Then with much toil we hacked and rent the hard flesh open, and as we did so I heard the knife point grate upon the gems within.

Cleopatra plunged her hand into the dead breast and drew forth somewhat. She held it to the light, and gave a little cry, for from the darkness of Pharaoh's heart there flashed into light and life the most beautiful emerald that ever man beheld. It was perfect in colour, very large, without a flaw, and fashioned to a scarabæus form, and on the under side

was an oval, inscribed with the divine name of Menkau-ra, Son of the Sun.

Again, again, and yet again, she plunged in her hand and drew emeralds from Pharaoh's breast bedded there in spices. Some were fashioned and some were not; but all were perfect in colour without a flaw, and in value priceless. Again and again she plunged her white hand into that dread breast, till at length all were found, and there were one hundred and forty and eight of such gems as are not known in the world. The last time that she searched she brought forth not emeralds, indeed, but two great pearls, wrapped in linen, such as never have been seen. And of these pearls more hereafter.

So it was done, and all the mighty treasure lay glittering in a heap before us. There it lay, and there, too, lay the regalia of gold, the spiced and sickly-scented wrappings, and the torn body of white-haired Pharaoh Menkau-ra, the Osirian, the ever living in Amenti.

We rose, and a great awe fell upon us, now that the deed was done and our hearts were no more upborne by the rage of search--so great an awe, indeed, that we could not speak. I made a sign to Cleopatra. She grasped the head of Pharaoh and I grasped his feet, and together we lifted him, climbed the Sphinx, and placed him once more within his coffin. I piled the torn mummy cloths over him and on them laid the lid of the coffin.

And now we gathered up the great gems, and such of the ornaments as might be carried with ease, and I hid them as many as I could, in the

folds of my robe. Those that were left Cleopatra hid upon her breast. Heavily laden with the priceless treasure, we gave one last look at the solemn place, at the sarcophagus and the Sphinx on which it rested, whose gleaming face of calm seemed to mock us with its everlasting smile of wisdom. Then we turned and went from the tomb.

At the shaft we halted. I called to the eunuch, who stayed above, and methought a faint mocking laugh answered me. Too smitten with terror to call again, and fearing that, should we delay, Cleopatra would certainly swoon, I seized the rope, and being strong and quick mounted by it and gained the passage. There burnt the lamp: but the eunuch I saw not. Thinking, surely, that he was a little way down the passage, and slept--as, in truth, he did--I bade Cleopatra make the rope fast about her middle, and with much labour, drew her up. Then, having rested awhile, we moved with the lamps to seek for the eunuch.

"He was stricken with terror and has fled, leaving the lamp," said Cleopatra. "O ye Gods! who is that seated there?"

I peered into the darkness, thrusting out the lamps, and this was what their light fell on--this at the very dream of which my soul sickens! There, facing us, his back resting against the rock, and his hands splayed on either side upon the floor, sat the eunuch--dead! His eyes and mouth were open, his fat cheeks dropped down, his thin hair yet seemed to bristle, and on his countenance was frozen such a stamp of hideous terror as well might turn the beholder's brain. And lo! fixed to his chin, by its hinder claws, hung that grey and mighty bat, which,

flying forth when we entered the pyramid, vanished in the sky, but, returning, had followed us to its depths. There it hung upon the dead man's chin slowly rocking itself to and fro, and we could see the fiery eyes shining in its head.

Aghast, utterly aghast, we stood and stared at the hateful sight; till presently the bat spread his huge wings and, losing his hold, sailed to us. Now he hovered before Cleopatra's face, fanning her with his white wings. Then with a scream, like a woman's shriek of fury, the accursed Thing flittered on, seeking his violated tomb, and vanished down the well into the sepulchre. I fell against the wall. But Cleopatra sank in a heap upon the floor, and, covering her head with her arms, she shrieked till the hollow passages rang with the echoes of her cries, that seemed to grow and double and rush along the depths in volumes of shrill sound.

"Rise!" I cried, "rise and let us hence before the Spirit shall return to haunt us! If thou dost suffer thyself to be overwhelmed in this place thou art lost for ever."

She staggered to her feet, and never may I forget the look upon her ashy face or in her glowing eyes. Seizing lamps with a rush, we passed the dead eunuch's horrid form, I holding her by the hand. We gained the great chamber, where was the sarcophagus of the Queen of Menkau-ra, and traversed its length. We fled along the passage. What if the Thing had closed the three mighty doors? No; they were open, and we sped through them; the last only did I stay to close. I touched the stone, as I knew

how, and the great door crashed down, shutting us off from the presence of the dead eunuch and the Horror that had hung upon the eunuch's chin. Now we were in the white chamber with the sculptured panels, and now we faced the last steep ascent. Oh that last ascent! Twice Cleopatra slipped and fell upon the polished floor. The second time--it was when half the distance had been done--she let fall her lamp, and would, indeed, have rolled down the slide had I not saved her. But in doing thus I, too, let fall my lamp that bounded away into shadow beneath us, and we were in utter darkness. And perchance about us, in the darkness, hovered that awful Thing!

"Be brave!" I cried; "O love, be brave, and struggle on, or both are lost! The way, though steep, is not far; and, though it be dark, we can scarce come to harm in this straight shaft. If the gems weight thee, cast them away!"

"Nay," she gasped, "that I will not; this shall not be endured to no end. I die with them!"

Then it was that I saw the greatness of this woman's heart; for in the dark, and notwithstanding the terrors we had passed and the awfulness of our state, she clung to me and clambered on up that dread passage. On we clambered, hand in hand, with bursting hearts, till there, by the mercy or the anger of the Gods, at length we saw the faint light of the moon, creeping through the little opening in the pyramid. One struggle more, now the hole was gained, and like a breath from heaven, the sweet night air played upon our brows. I climbed through, and, standing on a pile

of stones, lifted and dragged Cleopatra after me. She fell to the ground and then sank down upon it motionless.

I pressed upon the turning stone with trembling hands. It swung to and caught, leaving no mark of the secret place of entry. Then I leapt down and, having pushed away the pile of stones, looked on Cleopatra. She had swooned, and notwithstanding the dust and grime upon her face, it was so pale that at first I believed she must be dead. But placing my hand upon her heart I felt it stir beneath; and, being spent, I flung myself down beside her upon the sand, to gather up my strength again.