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BLUE  
RIBBON  
FICTION

# The CURSE OF A THOUSAND KISSES

by **Sax Rohmer** Illustrated by **MAUDE MARTIN EVERS**

## Out Toward the Great Pyramid It Led Him—and He Never Came Back.

SAVILLE GRAINGER will long be remembered by the public as a brilliant journalist and by his friends as a confirmed misogynist. His distaste for the society of women amounted to a mania, and Grainger a pretty face was like a red rag to a bull. This was all the more extraordinary—and for Grainger more painful—because he was one of the most handsome men ever known—very dark, with wonderful flashing eyes and the features of an early Roman—or, as I have since thought, of an aristocratic oriental; aquiline, clean cut, and warthy. At any mixed gatherings at which he appeared women gravitated in his direction as though he possessed some magnetic attraction for the sex, and Grainger invariably bolted.

His extraordinary end—never explained to this day—will be remembered by some of those who read of it; but so much that affected whole continents as occurred in the interval that to the majority of the public the circumstance will no longer be familiar. It created a considerable stir in Cairo at the time, as was only natural, but when the missing man failed to return the nine days' wonder of his disappearance was forgotten in the excitement of some new story or another.

Briefly, Grainger, who was recuperating at Mena house after a rather severe illness in London, went out one evening for a stroll, wearing a light dust coat over his evening clothes and smoking a cigaret. He turned in

the direction of the Great Pyramid—and never came back. That is the story in its entirety. No one has ever seen him—or ever reported having seen him.

The following story is an elaborate hoax perpetrated by Grainger himself, for some obscure reason remaining in hiding, or by another well acquainted with his handwriting—I do not profess to say. As to how it came into my possession, that may be told very briefly.

Two years after Grainger's disappearance I was in Cairo, and although I was not staying at Mena house I sometimes visited friends there. One night as I came out of the hotel to enter the car which was to give me back to the Continental a tall native, dressed in white and so muffled up that little more of his face than two gleaming eyes was visible, handed me a packet—a roll of paper, apparently—saluted me with extraordinary formality, and departed.

No one else seemed to have noticed the man, although the chauffeur, of course, was

nearly as close to him as I was, and a servant from the hotel had followed me out and down the steps. I stood there in the dusk, staring at the packet in my hand and then after the tall figure, already swallowed up in the shadows of the road. Naturally I assumed that the man had made some mistake, and holding the package near the lamp of the car I examined it closely.

It was a roll of some kind of parchment, tied with a fragment of thin string, and upon the otherwise blank outside page my name was written very distinctly!

I entered the car, rather dazed by the occurrence, which pre-

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"My life is thine," she said. "Take it." For one instant I hesitated, devouring her with my eyes.

That part of Grainger's narrative, if the following amazing statement is really the work of Grainger, which deals with events up to the time that he left Mena house—and the world—I have been able to check. The dragoman, Hassan Abd-el Kebir, was still practicing his profession at Mena house at the very time of my visit, and he confirmed the truth of Grainger's story in regard to the heart of lapis-lazuli, which he had seen, and the meeting with the old woman in the Muski, of which Grainger had spoken to him.

For the rest, the manuscript shall tell Grainger's story.

### The Manuscript.

#### I.

Two years have elapsed since I quitted the world, and the presence in Egypt of a one time colleague, of which I have been advised, prompts me to put on record these particulars of the strangest, most wonderful, and most beautiful experience which has ever befallen any man. I do not expect my story to be believed. The skepticism of the material world of Fleet street will consume my statement with its devouring fires. But I do not care. The old itching to make a "story" is upon me. As a "story" let this paper be regarded.

Where the experience actually began I must leave to each reader to judge for himself. I personally do not profess to know, even now. But the curtain first arose upon that part of the story which it is my present purpose to chronicle one afternoon near the corner of the Street of the Silversmiths in Cairo. I was wandering in those wonderful, narrow, winding lanes, unaccompanied, for I am by habit a solitary being, and despite my ignorance of the language and customs of the natives I awakened to the fact that a link of sympathy—of silent understanding—seemed to bind me to these busy brown men.

I had for many years cherished a secret ambition to pay a protracted visit to Egypt, but the ties of an arduous profession hitherto had rendered its realization impossible. Now, a stranger in a strange land, I found myself at home. I cannot hope to make evident to my readers the completeness of this recognition. From Shephard's with its throngs of cosmopolitan travelers and its hosts of pretty women I had early fled in dismay to the comparative quiet of Mena house. But the only real happiness I ever knew—indeed, as I soon began to realize, had ever known—I found among the discordant cries and mingled smells of perfume and decay in the native city. The desert called to me sweetly, but it was the people, the shops, the shuttered houses, the noise, and the smells of the eastern streets which gripped my heart.

Delightedly I watched the passage of these