



DARK ADVENTURE RADIO THEATRE:  
"IMPRISONED WITH THE PHARAOHS"

Written by

Sean Branney & Andrew Leman

Based on

"Under the Pyramids"  
by H. P. Lovecraft and Harry Houdini

Read-along Script  
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SFX: static, radio tuning, snippet of '30s song, more tuning, static dissolves to:

Dark Adventure Radio THEME MUSIC.

ANNOUNCER

Tales of intrigue, adventure, and the mysterious occult that will stir your imagination and make your very blood run cold.

MUSIC CRESCENDO.

ANNOUNCER (CONT'D)

This is Dark Adventure Radio Theatre, with your host Erskine Blackwell. Today's episode: H.P. Lovecraft's "Imprisoned with the Pharaohs!"

THEME MUSIC DIMINISHES. A MAGICAL FLOURISH gives way to EERIE MIDDLE EASTERN MUSIC.

ERSKINE BLACKWELL

When you think on the mysterious, the uncanny, the unexplained - one name comes to mind: Houdini! Even now, the world still mourns the passing of the master magician and escape artist. Today Dark Adventure Radio Theatre celebrates Houdini's enduring legacy with a special tale written by Houdini himself with master storyteller H.P. Lovecraft. Journey with us back to a time before the war, as Houdini searches for his next great illusion in exotic Egypt. His quest to master the orient's mysteries leads him to temples deep beneath the desert sands, and into the clutches of fearsome bedouins. Not even the great Houdini can escape the thrilling and horrifying secrets which have lurked for untold millennia under the pyramids in "Imprisoned with the Pharaohs!" But first, a word from our sponsor.

A few piano notes from the BUB-L-PEP JINGLE. JIM groans piteously.

ERSKINE BLACKWELL (CONT'D)  
 Hello there, Jim. You're not  
 looking too chipper today. A bit  
 too much last night?

JIM  
 (miserably hungover)  
 You can say that again.

SODA CAP POP AND HISS. POURING.

ERSKINE BLACKWELL  
 Overindulgence sure can leave you  
 feeling miserable the following  
 morning. But the quickest way to  
 regain your verve is with a tall  
 glass of Bub-L-Pep. This sparkling  
 lithiated beverage will quench your  
 nerves and put a spring back in  
 your step. Here, try a sip, Jim!

JIM  
 (miraculously improved)  
 Wow, that's fantastic. I'm feeling  
 better already!

ERSKINE BLACKWELL  
 When the night before leaves you  
 low the morning after, drink  
 delicious and invigorating Bub-L-  
 Pep. The L is for lithium!

BUB-L-PEP JINGLE.

BUB-L-PEP SINGERS  
 (singing)  
 Drink Bub-L-Pep! It'll fix you  
 fast!  
 Drink Bub-L-Pep! For a zip that  
 lasts!  
 That's Bub-L-Pep! Go and buy you  
 some!  
 The L is for lithium-yum-yum!

Dark Adventure LEAD-IN MUSIC.

ERSKINE BLACKWELL  
 And now, Dark Adventure Radio  
 Theatre presents a dramatic  
 adaptation of Harry Houdini and  
 H.P. Lovecraft's "Imprisoned with  
 the Pharaohs".

(MORE)

## ERSKINE BLACKWELL (CONT'D)

In 1914, with Europe on the brink of war, the great Houdini finished a professional engagement in England and set off to tour theatres in Australia. He determined to make the most of his journey by stopping along the way in a place that had always fascinated him: the land of the Nile. There, in old Cairo, Houdini and his wife Bess learn that mystery attracts mystery, when they thrill the city with a spectacular show at the American Cosmograph Theater! Backstage, they prepared for their performance....

2 BACK STAGE

2

HARRY HOUDINI, his wife BESS, and the rest of the cast and crew prepare for Houdini's act. It's noisy with SINGERS WARMING UP, an orchestra TUNING in the distance. Houdini CLANKS about with an armful of chains and handcuffs.

BESS

Harry, have you seen the drape for Metamorphosis?

HOUDINI

Look in the crates stage left, behind the Crystal Casket. Ah, these Arab stage hands... I can't find a damned thing!

RODRIGO, the Houdinis' assistant and right-hand man approaches.

RODRIGO

Excuse me, Houdini?

HOUDINI

Ah, Rodrigo. Give me hand and grab those leg irons.

CLANK.

RODRIGO

Yes, sir. I have a telegram for you sir.

BESS

(off)  
Found it!

HOUDINI  
My hands are full. Read it, will  
you?

He TEARS OPEN the telegram. Houdini works with chains.

RODRIGO  
Houdini - know just the man to help  
you out in Cairo. Stop. Bought him  
ticket for tonight. Seat AA20.  
Stop. Talk to him. Stop. Signed  
Charlie Tower. Stop. May your  
success never. Stop.

HOUDINI  
That's it?

RODRIGO  
Yes, sir.

HOUDINI  
Have you met Charlie?

RODRIGO  
Oh yes, sir. He came to the show at  
Olympia in Paris last year, with  
several lady friends.

HOUDINI  
He's something else. He's rich as  
Croesus and quite the ladies man.  
Take these, will you?

Houdini hands Rodrigo the chains.

HOUDINI (CONT'D)  
Say, find out who's sitting in seat  
AA20 and bring him backstage after  
the show.

RODRIGO  
Of course, sir. We're about thirty  
seconds to curtain time, Houdini.

HOUDINI  
Thanks.  
(to Bess)  
Bess? You seen my calico vest?

BESS  
(off)  
You're wearing it, Harry!

STAGE MANAGER  
(shouting, off)

APPLAUSE. Rudolf loves what he does and sells the show with a theatrical glee that would have made P.T. Barnum proud. He is a slick British showman.

RUDOLF LLOYD  
Thank you, thank you ladies and gentlemen. It's a pleasure to be here tonight and we have a spectacular show for you! Thrilling and delightful acts from around the world come to Cairo for your edification and amusement. Let the show begin! As you take your seats, prepare to be amazed by Professor Jocko - the world's smartest dog and his trained human - Umberto!

Music FLOURISH followed by BARKING. The audience LAUGHS. More BARKING. Louder LAUGHTER fading to...MUSIC...

RUDOLF LLOYD (CONT'D)  
...one clever pooch. That dog does tricks everywhere. And now we bring you a tuneful girly farce - "Down Among the Sheltering Palms" with Francine Kelley and Nine Others!

APPLAUSE... fading into the end of their song.

FRANCINE KELLEY  
(singing with backup)  
How my heart is yearning, yearning,  
yearning  
To be down among the sheltering  
palms  
O honey, wait for me

Fade out singers and building applause. Fade in...

RUDOLF LLOYD  
...more than eight hundred pounds.  
You'll see ladies and gentlemen,  
Larry Conklin truly is stronger  
than steel.

Applause. Sound of GREAT EFFORT... dissolves to...

RUDOLF LLOYD (CONT'D)  
 ... no doubt about it, ladies and gentlemen, Larry Conklin is mighty indeed. And now, May and Mayknot - comedy's clever couple.

MAYKNOT may be a bit tipsy.

MAY  
 My brother just got elected as mayor.

MAYKNOT  
 Honestly?

MAY  
 Well, I don't know about that...

MAYKNOT  
 Say, where did you go this afternoon?

MAY  
 This afternoon? I went to the museum.

MAYKNOT  
 Went to the museum?

MAY  
 Yes, went right inside.

MAYKNOT  
 Why did you do that? Was it raining?

MAY  
 No, it wasn't raining. We're in Egypt! I went in to see an ancient curiosity.

MAYKNOT  
 An ancient curiosity?

MAY  
 An ancient curiosity.

MAYKNOT  
 You had to go into the museum to see an ancient curiosity? Why didn't you just go home to your wife?

MAY

Say, I didn't tell you my wife got a new job. Now she's the sharpshooter in Buffalo Bill's Wild West show.

MAYKNOT

A shipshopper... shatshooper... a sharpshooter?

MAY

Yes, sir. My wife's a very good shot. Why, she can hit a silver dollar at a hundred yards.

MAYKNOT

That's nothing. My wife goes through my pockets and never misses a dime.

RIM SHOT. Laughter/applause/transition.

RUDOLF LLOYD

...certainly is the best medicine. Now from the shores of tropical Acapulco, we bring you Wee Mona, the tiny tap dancer, singing "She Sell Sea-Shells".

The orchestra PLAYS and she sings in the tinny thin voice of a midget.

WEE MONA

She sells seashells by the seashore,  
The shells she sells are seashells,  
I'm sure...

Crossfade to lively RUSSIAN DANCE MUSIC hitting its grand finalé.

BOUTROS BROTHERS

(striking final tableau)

Hey!

ROUSING APPLAUSE.

RUDOLF LLOYD

How do they do it? The Boutros Brothers. Two brothers with only two legs between them.

(MORE)



RUDOLF LLOYD (CONT'D)  
And now, prepare your funny bones  
for Belgium's favorite  
ventriloquist: the amazing Pavao  
and his friend Gaspar.

Transition. Perky orchestra music. Gaspar is, of course,  
Pavao's dummy and speaks as such.

PAVAO  
Your father was in the war, Gaspar?

GASPAR  
Oh yes, he was. He killed a hundred  
men.

PAVAO  
A hundred men! What was he, a  
gunner?

GASPAR  
Nope. A Cook!

PAVAO  
Oh, Gaspar!

GASPAR  
Say, Pavao, I've finally found a  
place where I can find money every  
time I look for it.

PAVAO  
Oh, really? Where's that?

GASPAR  
The dictionary!

PAVAO  
Oh, Gaspar!

GASPAR  
I've been thinking, I want you to  
get me a dog.

PAVAO  
A dog? Hmmm, that might be good for  
you. What kind of dog would you  
like?

GASPAR  
A hot dog?

PAVAO  
They're the nicest.

GASPAR

What makes you say that, Gaspar?

PAVAO

A hot dog is the only kind of dog  
that feed the hand that bites it!

GASPAR

Oh Gaspar!

PAVAO

Pavao, I've been thinking, I think  
we should leave Brussels and move  
here to Egypt!

GASPAR

But there's riots, dangerous  
criminals, corruption and the  
government's in shambles.

PAVAO

I know! That's what I hate about  
Brussels!

GASPAR

Oh Gaspar!

Orchestral RIMSHOT followed by LAUGHTER and APPLAUSE.  
Crossfade into TAP DANCING with LIVELY BANJO MUSIC which ends  
with APPLAUSE.

RUDOLF LLOYD

The Bibble Brothers with their  
genuine Louisiana negro dance.  
Thank you, gentlemen. And next we  
bring direct from Avignon, France,  
the juggling sensation LeGrue!

APPLAUSE. Burst of LIVELY MUSIC accompanying his juggling.  
OOHS AND AHS from audience.

RUDOLF LLOYD (CONT'D)

Impressive, no? But you see, Mssr.  
LeGrue is stone blind!

GASPS of NO from the audience. The MUSIC BUILDS. LeGrue  
juggles faster.

RUDOLF LLOYD (CONT'D)

The lovely Marie has affixed a  
blindfold to prove LeGrue can see  
nothing as he juggles four  
porcelain plates. Five. Six!

Burst of APPLAUSE AND MUSIC. A plate SMASHES on the stage.

RUDOLF LLOYD (CONT'D)

Ha, ha, all part of the show,  
folks. And now prepare to see the  
uncanny power of Mesmerism  
unleashed here tonight by Gertie  
van Dyck - the Mentalist of Old  
Amsterdam!

TA-DAH! APPLAUSE. She's middle aged, honey-voiced with an  
indeterminate Euro-accent.

GERTIE VAN DYCK

I will show you the hidden, secret  
powers of the mind. I ask for a  
volunteer. A man. A strong healthy  
man... You there, please come up to  
the stage. Yes, a round of  
applause.

The crowd claps.

GERTIE VAN DYCK (CONT'D)

What is your name, young man?

VOLUNTEER

I'm Richard.

GERTIE VAN DYCK

Yes, you are quite tall Richard,  
no?

VOLUNTEER

Yes, ma'am. Almost six feet.

GERTIE VAN DYCK

Mmm, yes, very good. I introduce to  
you my assistant, Maxine. Maxine is  
stands only four feet and ten  
inches tall. Now, I shall set forth  
my hypnotic powers to place Maxine  
into a mesemeric state.

The orchestra strikes up EXOTIC HYPNOTIC MUSIC.

GERTIE VAN DYCK (CONT'D)

Maxine, you will surrender your  
conscious mind to me. You shall  
feel nothing until I command you to  
awaken.

(dramatically)

You are now light as a feather and  
stiff as a board!

(MORE)

GERTIE VAN DYCK (CONT'D)  
 Come, Richard, let us lift her. I  
 shall hold her head and you lift  
 her feet. Go ahead.

The audience GASPS.

GERTIE VAN DYCK (CONT'D)  
 Tell me, is she heavy?

VOLUNTEER  
 No, she really is...

GERTIE VAN DYCK  
 ...light as a feather, stiff as a  
 board!

Applause.

Crossfade to THE FINAL BARS OF "WHEN IRISH EYES ARE SMILING"  
 sung harmoniously by the Conroy Family Singers.

CONROY FAMILY SINGERS  
 When Irish hearts are happy, all  
 the world seems bright and gay,  
 And When Irish Eyes Are Smiling,  
 sure, they steal your heart away.

RUDOLF LLOYD  
 Wasn't that beautiful? A round of  
 applause for Ireland's treasure:  
 The Conroy Family Singers!

STAGE MANAGER  
 Places everyone, places!

3 FRONT ROW

3

The audience moves to their seats just before show time. It  
 is a grand vaudeville house.

The orchestra SWELLS and the crowd HUSHES as a brief OVERTURE  
 plays. Then the music ushers on the Master of Ceremonies,  
 RUDOLF LLOYD.

PA ANNOUNCER  
 Ladies and Gentlemen, your Master  
 of Ceremonies for the evening,  
 Rudolf Lloyd!

BOISTEROUS applause. As the applause fades, the MUSIC BECOMES  
 OMINOUS AND DRAMATIC.

RUDOLF LLOYD

And now, ladies and gentlemen,  
prepare yourselves for tonight's  
headline act. We bring you Europe's  
Eclipsing Sensation, the world's  
premiere prison breaker, the  
supreme master of mystery -  
HOUDINI!

Lively applause. There is a WHOOSHY sound as HOUDINI  
dramatically appears on the stage - the audience GASPS and  
the orchestra gives a dramatic chord. Furious applause.

Houdini is a consummate showman. He's supremely confident and  
his manner is pleasant and easy.

HOUDINI

Good evening. I am Houdini.  
Tonight, I shall amaze you. I shall  
confound you with illusions and  
feats which will make you doubt  
your own eyes. I shall escape from  
the inescapable. For your  
enjoyment, I shall subject myself  
to feats of daring and extreme  
physical endurance. I will show you  
the impossible. I am Houdini!

A POOF of something on stage and something unbelievable has  
happened. The audience ROARS in appreciation.

HOUDINI (CONT'D)

People sometimes say to me,  
"Houdini, your show is so  
spectacular, what with the  
beautiful illusions, the costumes,  
all those assistants... how can you  
pay for it all?" To them I say, why  
it's easy. When one is a magician,  
one can get money for nothing. Why  
see this plain cloth bag? Quite  
empty, inside and out. And yet a  
magician reaches inside...

(mystical pause)

...and finds this!

MILD RIPPLING OF SURPRISE AND APPLAUSE.

HOUDINI (CONT'D)

...large gold coin.

It falls to the stage with a hearty CLANG. As his patter continues, we hear MORE AND MORE COINS FALLING TO THE STAGE, eventually becoming a barrage of 500 coins piling up at his feet. The audience APPLAUSE GROWS as he keeps going.

HOUDINI (CONT'D)  
 What's this? Another? And another?  
 Why they just keep coming.

The ORCHESTRA STRIKES A FINAL TA-DAH!

HOUDINI (CONT'D)  
 And that, my friends, is how a  
 magician gets his money for  
 nothing!

APPLAUSE! Coins move as ASSISTANTS START BAGGING THEM.

HOUDINI (CONT'D)  
 As my assistants prepare to take  
 these coins to the bank, I think  
 it's only fair that I help them  
 out. Ladies and gentlemen, you will  
 see suspended above the audience a  
 large glass bucket. May I have a  
 light on it? There you see it?

The CROWD MURMURS as they see it.

HOUDINI (CONT'D)  
 I don't know if you have the same  
 problem I do. But it seems every  
 time I have money in my hand, it  
 somehow... vanishes!

MINOR GASP as Houdini's clearly made it disappear. A distant CLINK of a big coin falling into a glass bucket.

HOUDINI (CONT'D)  
 Hmmm, why yes, there it goes, into  
 the bucket above you. Let's see  
 what happens to this one.  
 (it vanishes from his hand  
 and CLINKS into the  
 bucket)  
 And this one. Yes, this one too.  
 Why they just slip through my  
 fingers.

MUSIC BUILDS as does the FAST AND FURIOUS SOUND OF COINS FALLING INTO THE BUCKET. The AUDIENCE ROARS in approval...

CROSSFADE into lyrical music.

HOUDINI (CONT'D)

...my lovely assistant Bess,  
dressed as Winter Herself stands  
clearly before you on this tall  
table. And as I raise this screen,  
we see her lovely silhouette. Wave  
to the folks, will you Bess? But,  
in less than one millionth of a  
second--she's GONE!

ORCHESTRA HIT - the AUDIENCE ROARS in amazement. CROSSFADE...

BESS

...Houdini's handcuffed, manacled,  
tied in a sack and locked in the  
trunk below me. But faster than you  
can count one, two...

HOUDINI

...three, it's Houdini!

He appears! ORCHESTRA! APPLAUSE. CROSSFADE...

HOUDINI (CONT'D)

...our grand finalé, the most  
dangerous escape I have ever  
attempted. I shall be lowered head-  
first into this water-filled and  
metal strapped tank you see before  
you. My feet will be securely  
locked above my head. I, Houdini,  
will offer the sum of one thousand  
dollars to anyone who can prove it  
is possible to get air from the  
upside down position in which I  
shall be secured. Now, I invite  
these lovely audience volunteers to  
inspect the apparatus thoroughly as  
I shall change into my swimming  
costume.

MUSICAL FLOURISH. CROSSFADE.

HOUDINI (CONT'D)

... my legs are now firmly secured  
and locked. Ladies and gentlemen, I  
can hold my breath for two minutes.  
When I am lowered into the tank, I  
invite you to hold your breath  
along with me.

(MORE)

HOUDINI (CONT'D)

My assistant Rodrigo will be standing by with this fire axe in the event I am unable to extricate myself in less than two minutes. Let us begin. These pulleys lift me by my feet.

The AUDIENCE MURMURS, impressed as Houdini now hangs from his feet.

HOUDINI (CONT'D)

(inverted and strained)

And now, from this upside down position, ladies and gentlemen, I give you my most daring and dangerous escape of all time, the Water Torture Cell.

SPLASH as Houdini is lowered into the water. Audience members GASP. There's CLANKING as metal bars are affixed and locks are closed. The ORCHESTRA STRIKES UP "Asleep in the Deep".

BESS

We shall raise this curtain around the tank as Houdini attempts his escape. Our volunteers will surround the curtain to ensure no outside assistance is made available to Houdini. Are you holding your breath? We're now at thirty seconds.

(time passes)

One minute.

(more)

That's one minute and forty five seconds...

WILD THRASHING AND WATERY SOUNDS come from the tank.

BESS (CONT'D)

Two minutes! Rodrigo is the axe ready?

RODRIGO

Yes, ma'am. Shall I...?

BESS

No wait!

There's a BUZZ OF EXCITEMENT FROM THE AUDIENCE.

BESS (CONT'D)

Two minutes fifteen seconds.



RODRIGO  
No, you know he can't go any  
longer!

BESS  
Wait!

TA-DA! The curtain falls and we hear the SOGGY sound of  
Houdini, PANTING FOR BREATH.

HOUDINI  
I am HOUDINI!

The audience EXPLODES in APPLAUSE!

Transition Music.

4 BACK STAGE

4

The Houdinis change out of their performance clothes after  
the show.

HOUDINI  
We showed these Egyptians a thing  
or two, eh my dear?

BESS  
Certainly more than they'd get from  
that incompetent handcuff faker we  
saw on the boat from London.  
Everywhere we go there's someone  
trying to steal your act.

HOUDINI  
The world's full of charlatans and  
ne'er-do-wells, my dear.

BESS  
But there's only one Houdini!

They SMOOCH and CHUCKLE together.

HOUDINI  
Still, a lively house tonight.

BESS  
Oh, Harry, before tomorrow would  
you take a look at the catch on  
Good Bye Winter? It's sticking  
again.

HOUDINI  
Certainly, my love.

KNOCKING at the door.

BESS

Enter!

RODRIGO

Excuse me, Houdini?

HOUDINI

Yes, Rodrigo?

RODRIGO

You have a visitor. A Mr. Ward?

HOUDINI

Never heard of him.

RODRIGO

He was in seat AA20. You asked me to...

BESS

Harry! The telegram from Charlie Tower? It must be the man he sent.

HOUDINI

Of course. You decent?

BESS

Decent enough.

HOUDINI

All right, send him in.

BESS

Be nice now. Any friend of Charlie's is---

HOUDINI

---probably a very interesting person.

The DOOR OPENS.

RODRIGO

This way, sir. Houdini, may I present Mr. Ward?

HOUDINI

How do you do, Ward?

NATE WARD

It's a great pleasure to make your acquaintance, Mr. Houdini.

HOUDINI

Please, just Houdini. This is my beloved wife Beatrice.

BESS

How do you do, Mr. Ward? Please call me Bess.

NATE WARD

I'm honored. Professor Nathaniel Ward. You can just call me Nate.

HOUDINI

Professor, eh? What do you teach? You sound like an American.

NATE WARD

I'm an archeologist with Miskatonic University in Arkham, Mass.

HOUDINI

See, Bess, told you he'd be interesting.

(singing)

"Onward Miskatonic, on to victory..."

(speaking)

I saw the game against Brown this fall. Your Myrmidons gave them quite a trouncing.

NATE WARD

Oh, you've been there? I'm afraid I don't really follow the sports myself.

HOUDINI

But you must! College football is a gas!

NATE WARD

Oh, well I...

BESS

(rescuing him)

Don't mind him, Nate. This brute is always drawn to physical feats and men crashing into each other. But a great university is great because of its scholars! Isn't that right?

NATE WARD

Well, I should hope so! Thank you, Mrs. Houdini. Bess.

HOUDINI

Well I'm a scholar from the school  
of hard locks!

Everyone laughs.

NATE WARD

I must say, I quite enjoyed your  
performance tonight. Tremendous.  
Your costume as Winter was lovely.

BESS

Oh, that's very kind of you.

HOUDINI

What'd you like best, professor?

NATE WARD

Well, the, um... water cell was  
quite a thrill.

HOUDINI

My upside-down? Oh, it's a crowd  
pleaser, no doubt. And not as easy  
to imitate as the old milk can  
escape.

NATE WARD

And when you disappeared from that  
table... how did you do it?

HOUDINI

A magician never reveals his  
secrets.

NATE WARD

Ah, quite right. That would spoil  
the fun, wouldn't it?

BESS

I like this fellow, Harry. And we  
understand you're a friend of  
Charlie Tower?

NATE WARD

We've been able to help each other  
out from time to time.

HOUDINI

How is that young rascal? Last  
time I saw him was in Paris - I  
showed him how to make a few  
bottles of Châteauneuf-du-Pape  
disappear!

All LAUGH.

NATE WARD

He's well. I'm here in Cairo doing a bit of research for his father's foundation.

HOUDINI

I'll bet. The Towers have fingers in a lot of pies, believe you me.

BESS

Well, no place like Cairo for archeology, I imagine?

NATE WARD

No ma'am.

HOUDINI

Charlie said you might be able to help me out with something, Professor.

NATE WARD

Please, call me Nate. What might I be able to do for you?

HOUDINI

Nate, a man in my business is always on the look out for the next big thing. A new show stopper. The next Water Torture Cell. I've got to keep ahead of the imitators.

NATE WARD

I can only imagine.

HOUDINI

I've got in my mind to do something Egyptian. The public's ga-ga for Egypt: pharaohs, mummies and all that. We've only just arrived here and thought we should have a look around for inspiration.

BESS

Harry was thinking of creating an illusion inspired by some of the artefacts, one of those mummy boxes or something like that.

NATE WARD

I see. Well, I'm doing some work at the Cairo Museum.

(MORE)

NATE WARD (CONT'D)

I'd be happy to make introductions,  
show you around their collection.  
There are thousands of pieces--

HOUDINI

That Charlie Tower's a genius!  
You're just the kind of guy we're  
looking for, Nate.

BESS

You're sure it wouldn't be an  
imposition?

NATE WARD

No, no, I was planning to be there  
anyway. I'll speak to the curator.  
Would ten o'clock work for you?

HOUDINI

Capital! We'll see you there!

MUSIC transition.

5

AT THE MUSEUM

5

ERSKINE BLACKWELL

The next morning, Professor Ward  
joined Houdini and his wife at the  
Museum of Egyptian Antiquities. A  
storehouse of priceless treasures  
in Tahrir Square, topped with a  
Roman dome. There they met with  
Jean-Paul Dupuis, the associate  
curator of the great  
institution....

We FADE IN on a conversation already underway. DUPUIS lives  
on the bureaucratic side of archeology; he speaks with a  
French dialect.

DUPUIS

...but I'm afraid the director will  
be supervising a dig site this  
entire week. Howard Carter just  
discovered a new trove of mummies  
at Qasr Farafra, and Director  
Maspero is most eager to ensure  
they do not fall into the hands of  
smugglers. I fear our resources are  
stretched very thin.

NATE WARD

There's only a handful of staff here. Like most museums.

DUPUIS

Hélas....

HOUDINI

Gee that's tough. But I've got something here that might make things a bit easier for you boys.

Houdini sits and makes his checkbook appear. He starts writing out a check.

DUPUIS

What is that, Monsieur Houdini?

HOUDINI

Please, just Houdini. You take checks, don't you? I can assure you it's good.

DUPUIS

Monsieur?

HOUDINI

Bess and I thought we might make a little donation to the museum. And maybe the museum might be able to help us find the right prop for our show.

DUPUIS

Oh, Monsieur!

NATE WARD

Houdini, I didn't mean to imply--

HOUDINI

Oh, tut tut, picture it, Nate, I'm all bound up, wrapped up like a mummy and lowered into one of those big funny stone coffins.

NATE WARD

A sarcophagus.

HOUDINI

Right. We bury the whole thing in dirt, there's music and voilà, I escape!

(dramatically)

(MORE)

HOUDINI (CONT'D)  
Under the Pyramids - Houdini's  
latest marvel.

BESS  
Oh, Harry! Not dirt. Think of the  
costumes!

HOUDINI  
Okay, sand. All nice and clean.  
She's the practical one, eh Nate?

DUPUIS  
Excusez-moi, monsieur, you cannot  
purchase objects--

HOUDINI  
I'm not purchasing anything, Mr.  
Dupuis. Bess and I are supporting a  
valuable institution and helping  
protect Egypt's treasures. If Lord  
Carnarvon can do it, why can't I?

DUPUIS  
Well, I suppose....

HOUDINI  
Would ten thousand dollars make for  
a suitable donation?

DUPUIS  
(stunned in a good way)  
Oh, but of course, Houdini. Most  
generous. I mean, I'm sure some  
kind of arrangement could be made.

NATE WARD  
Perhaps Director Maspero should be  
consulted before--

DUPUIS  
On many occasions, the director has  
made gifts from our collection to  
the museum's greatest benefactors.

HOUDINI  
Sure! Sure he has!

BESS  
That's so kind of you, Mssr.  
Dupuis.

NATE WARD  
Why can't you just build a replica?



(Awkward pause)

NATE WARD (CONT'D)

I mean, it's only a ma--

HOUDINI

It must be real! The public demands it! I am Houdini!

BESS

If it were a replica, Nate, the press would accuse Houdini of common trickery. His feats of escape are all entirely genuine.

NATE WARD

Of course. I see that.

DUPUIS

Still, monsieur, it would be...

HOUDINI

Did I say ten? Let's make it fifteen thousand. What do you say, Dupuis?

DUPUIS

Professor Ward, why don't we take our benefactors to Storeroom B. I dare say the professor could tell you even more about some of our collection than I could.

NATE WARD

I suppose there are more sarcophagi in there than you could ever put on display...

DUPUIS

This way, madame. Monsieur.

The DOOR CLOSES behind them.

6

MUSEUM STOREROOM

6

ERSKINE BLACKWELL

The objects exhibited at the museum were just a fraction of the collections held in musty storerooms on the lower floors.

(MORE)

ERSKINE BLACKWELL (CONT'D)

In one such room, a Egyptian workman, Ansep Al Massri, attended to one of the artifacts when the doors suddenly opened....

AL MASSRI

(quietly, in Arabic)

Aywa ya malekti, ana 7amiki--  
Yes, my queen, I stand guard over  
you--

A HEAVY STEEL BAR moves and DOOR OPENS. ECHOING FOOTSTEPS.

DUPUIS

Here we are. Perhaps we'll find something-- Oh! One of the local workmen. They're dirt cheap. You there, which one are you again?

AL MASSRI

I am Al Massri at your service, effendi.

DUPUIS

Out of the way. We have important visitors. This is Houdini! And his charming wife.

BESS

Good heavens, there's so many...

HOUDINI

It's quite a warehouse you have down here, Dupuis.

BESS

These coffins, what do you call them again?

NATE WARD

The word is sarcophagus. From the Greek, meaning "flesh-eating". The Egyptians called them "neb-ankh".

HOUDINI

"Flesh eating"? Now that's a phrase made for a billboard! In letters four feet high!

NATE WARD

Every sarcophagus is unique. Sometimes you'd have multiple sarcophagi nested inside each other with a mummy in the innermost one.

(MORE)

NATE WARD (CONT'D)

Outer ones are usually stone but inner ones could be metal, wood, alabaster...

BESS

Harry, look at this one over here!

DUPUIS

You there, Al Massoud, wipe that off so Mrs. Houdini doesn't get herself dirty.

AL MASSRI

Yes, effendi. Sorry madam.

BESS

Don't mind me.

SCUTTling FOOTSTEPS and RUSTLING CLOTH.

HOUDINI

Nice black finish. Looks impressive. Probably weighs a ton or more.

DUPUIS

Yes, carved from diorite, like many of the statues in the main hall upstairs. Incredibly hard and durable. One might even say inescapable....

NATE WARD

(troubled)

That's not an ideal one, but over here's one that belonged to an 18th dynasty prince, Djhutmose. You can see the prince's cat on the side. The cat's name was Ta-miu...

BESS

The black one would look better on stage.

NATE WARD

But this one's gilded...

HOUDINI

What's wrong with the black one?

NATE WARD

That's one from Banks, isn't it, Dupuis?

DUPUIS

Yes, we acquired it from J. Edgar Banks, an archeologist who, let us say, does not enjoy an untarnished reputation. Its provenance is... uncertain.

HOUDINI

Well, hell, I don't care where it came from. It looks great!

AL MASSRI

But it still contains the mummy!

MUSICAL STING.

DUPUIS

Was someone talking to you?

AL MASSRI

I beg pardon, effendi, but I--

HOUDINI

What's all this now? A mummy?

BESS

You don't say!

HOUDINI

That's even better!

DUPUIS

Yes. Banks dated it to the 4th Dynasty, claimed it was the sarcophagus of Pharaoh Khephren's wife.

NATE WARD

Nitocris. The Egyptians called her NEET-iker-et.

DUPUIS

It might not be not true. And the mummy's condition is rather poor. I believe half of the face is gone.

HOUDINI

That's not a problem. Makes it scarier.

NATE WARD

(serious)

Houdini, you don't want this one.

HOUDINI

Why not? It sounds ideal.

NATE WARD

It's the history that surrounds it,  
well, the folklore.

BESS

What do you mean?

HOUDINI

Spit it out, Nate. Let's hear it.

Bed of CREEPY MUSIC.

NATE WARD

According to Herodotus, Pharaoh  
Khephren was the son of Khufu, who  
built the Great Pyramid. Khephren -  
the Egyptians called him KHA-ef-rah  
- built the second pyramid to house  
his remains after his death. His  
queen Nitocris was a subtle and  
cruel ruler, in legend anyway. It's  
said she invited all the lords and  
viziers whom she counted as her  
enemies to a great feast in a  
magnificent temple built for the  
occasion. As her guests said their  
prayers before the feast, she  
opened waterways to flood the  
temple and drown them all in the  
waters of the Nile.

BESS

Good heavens...

NATE WARD

She was reviled by her people. They  
revolted against her and King  
Khephren. It's said she was  
mummified while she was still  
alive. In this sarcophagus.

HOUDINI

(impressed)

Hmmm.

NATE WARD

There's more. Arab legends say that the spirits of Nitocris and Khephren lived on, ghoulish monarchs ruling over an army of mummies that are neither man nor beast, deep beneath the Temple of the Sphinx.

MUSICAL PUNCTUATION, and a BEAT of silence.

BESS

That is quite a story.

HOUDINI

It's perfect! Dupuis, we'll take it. A queen for my queen!

DUPUIS

Oh monsieur, c'est impossible. A very special permit would be required.

HOUDINI

How about another five grand donation and you throw the mummy in?

DUPUIS

Fortunately, as Associate Curator, I am in charge of issuing such permits.

HOUDINI

We'll put her on display in the theatre lobby. The crowds'll love it!

NATE WARD

Houdini...

HOUDINI

Don't worry so much, Nate. This isn't history. It's showbiz. Besides, didn't he say it's probably not even true?

NATE WARD

People still believe these legends, Houdini. It could cause problems for you.

AL MASSRI

Please, professor is right. I have heard there are men who--

DUPUIS  
Silence, you!

NATE WARD  
I'm just saying, take another look  
at Djhutmose...

HOUDINI  
You're an archeologist! Don't tell  
me you believe in spooks!

NATE WARD  
It's not--

HOUDINI  
Or is it some kind of native outcry  
you're worried about? Poppycock,  
that's just more publicity for the  
act. We're talking about a show  
that will thrill the world! I'm not  
worried about a handful of mad  
Arabs with some fringe beliefs.  
What can they do?

NATE WARD  
Well--

DUPUIS  
Come. We should leave this place.  
You there, Al...  
(not remembering his name)  
you will prepare the sarcophagus  
and the mummy for Mssr. Houdini.

AL MASSRI  
As you command, effendim.

FOOTSTEPS.

DUPUIS  
Follow me, please. Madam Houdini,  
have you seen Cairo yet?

BESS  
Not yet. Our hotel, the theatre and  
this museum are all we've seen.

DUPUIS  
Morbleu! I shall send a museum  
guide to take you on a grand  
sightseeing tour of the city.

HOUDINI  
Smashing. You coming, Nate?

NATE WARD  
I'll be along.

HOUDINI  
Don't look so glum, Nate. You've done us a great favor in finding this thing!

The Houdinis and Dupuis go.

AL MASSRI  
(under his breath in Arabic)  
Be kowet Nitocris elazeem, alla'ana ala elkelab elkafara!  
*By the powers of Great Nitocris I call down a curse upon these infidel dogs!*

NATE WARD  
Not very civil of you to call down a curse.

AL MASSRI  
Forgive me, effendi. I did not...

NATE WARD  
(in Arabic)  
...aref enny batkalleem arabi.  
...*know I spoke Arabic.*  
(to himself in English)  
Ah never mind. Dammit, Charlie, what have you got me into?

7 DEN OF INIQUITY

7

Transition MUSIC. SFX of the sounds of the Cairo streets.

ERSKINE BLACKWELL  
As soon as the Westerners had left, Al Massri slipped out of the museum and went to the Suken-Nahhasin, the bazaar of the coppersmiths. He wended his way through back alleys to a dark narrow doorway none of the locals dared enter.

The Arabs speak in English with Arabic dialects.

KAREEM  
Halt. It's you, Al Massri. What do you want?



AL MASSRI  
I must speak to the master. It is  
urgent.

KAREEM  
Go.

FOOTSTEPS. A PARTING CURTAIN.

AL MASSRI  
Forgive me, sheikh, for this  
intrusion.

ABDUL REIS speaks with a tomb-deep unnaturally resonant  
voice.

ABDUL REIS  
What do you want, Al Massri?

AL MASSRI  
The American magician, Houdini, he  
is here in Cairo.

ABDUL REIS  
This is well known.

AL MASSRI  
But master, he was just at the  
museum where he has bought the  
sarcophagus of our queen.

ABDUL REIS  
What?

AL MASSRI  
It's true. He plans to use it in  
some kind of magic trick. Not just  
the sarcophagus, he's bought her  
mummy too.

ABDUL REIS  
How dare he! Such sacrilege must be  
paid for!

AL MASSRI  
The Curator Dupuis sold her to him.  
And there was another American, an  
archeologist. He heard me call down  
a curse on them.

ABDUL REIS  
Idiot!

AL MASSRI  
 Forgive me. Shall I take care of  
 this Houdini?

ABDUL REIS  
 (thinking)  
 No... You take care of the curator  
 and the archeologist. I shall  
 handle the famous Houdini  
 personally.

OMINOUS STING and transition MUSIC.

8 STREETS OF CAIRO

8

ERSKINE BLACKWELL  
 Later, Houdini and Bess looked at  
 the wares sold at a tourist stall  
 near Shepheard's Hotel....

FADE IN STREET BACKGROUND NOISE.

HOUDINI  
 I must say, I thought Cairo would  
 be more... I don't know...  
 Egyptian. This street could be any  
 big city. Where's the Oriental  
 glamor? Where's the mystery?

BESS  
 That guide from the museum should  
 have been here thirty minutes ago.

HOUDINI  
 You're on Arab time now, darling.

A crowd of children gather around Bess BEGGING NOISILY.

BESS  
 O heavens, look at these poor  
 children.

HOUDINI  
 Just ignore them or we'll never get  
 rid of them. Bess, what do you  
 think of this? It's one of those  
 pharaoh headdresses! Too gaudy?

YOUSSEF, an old man adept in selling junk to tourists,  
 shuffles up to Houdini.

YOUSSEF  
 Very handsome on you, sir.

BESS

(off)

No, children, I'm sorry, I don't have anything...

HOUDINI

How much?

YOUSSEF

Very ancient. I make you good bargain.

Suddenly a tomb-deep and weirdly hollow voice rings out.

ABDUL REIS

(in Arabic)

Imshi! Imshi!

The children flee with SQUEALS OF TERROR.

YOUSSEF

For you, effendi, twenty--

ABDUL REIS

(in loud vicious Arabic)

Oskot khales ya zeft. enta ezzay takhod felous men so7abi al zebala dih?

*Silence you old cretin. You dare charge my friends for this junk?*

YOUSSEF

(in Arabic)

Ana assef, ma assadtेश, same7ni. I am sorry, I meant no offense. Forgive me.

(English)

Please, you take. No charge. I give you.

HOUDINI

Nice trick there. Are you from--

ABDUL REIS

Salam alekum. I am Abdul Reis el Drogman. I shall be your guide.

HOUDINI

That's quite a name. I'm Houdini! My wife Bess. This is Abdul Reis al Drogman from the museum.

ABDUL REIS

Your humble servant, madame.

BESS

Harry, we need to pay for the...  
How much is it?

ABDUL REIS

Please madame. This man sells only  
cheap trinkets made for tourists.  
His wares are unworthy of you. It  
would be my pleasure to show you  
the real Egypt.

HOUDINI

The real Egypt?

ABDUL REIS

Yes. Old Cairo. The ancient, exotic  
and mysterious Cairo. The one  
unseen by most visitors. This I can  
show you and much more. Come. A  
motorcoach awaits.

HOUDINI

Sounds like just our kind of  
fellow, eh Bess?

BESS

It does sound exciting. If Mssr.  
Dupuis sent him, I suppose he knows  
best.

HOUDINI

Yes, of course. Let's go!

The doors of the coach SLAM shut and the driver HONKS the  
horn as they pull out into the crazed Cairo traffic. MUSIC  
and SFX underscore the narration.

ERSKINE BLACKWELL

They drove east, past the Ezbekiyeh  
Gardens along the Mouski, and saw  
such wonders as they had before  
only read and dreamed of. Old Cairo  
was a story-book and a dream-  
labyrinth of narrow alleys redolent  
of aromatic secrets; maelstroms of  
Oriental traffic with strange  
cries, cracking whips, rattling  
carts, jingling money, and braying  
donkeys; kaleidoscopes of robes,  
veils, turbans, and tarbushes;  
water-carriers and dervishes,  
soothsayers and barbers;

(MORE)

ERSKINE BLACKWELL (CONT'D)  
 and over all the whining of blind  
 beggars, and the sonorous chanting  
 of muezzins from minarets limned  
 delicately against a sky of deep,  
 unchanging blue.

9 MESSAGE FOR YOU, SIR

9

ERSKINE BLACKWELL  
 Meanwhile, not far from the museum,  
 masked visitors approached the home  
 of Associate Curator Jean-Paul  
 Dupuis.

MUFFLED WHISPERING among men, then FOOTSTEPS on the dusty  
 earth.

KNOCKING. MUTTERING IN FRENCH. The door OPENS.

DUPUIS  
 (muttering)  
 Qui est-ce que ça peut encore bien  
 être, qui vient me...  
 (opening door)  
 Yes? What do you - oh, it's you. Al  
 Massrah, isn't it? What do you  
 want?

AL MASSRI  
 I have a message for you, sir.

DUPUIS  
 Well, what is it?

WHACK. A club STRIKES Dupuis and he SLUMPS to the ground with  
 a GROAN. MUSICAL STING.

AL MASSRI  
 Quick, take him, take him!

Men pick him up and hurry away with his body.

10 STREETS OF CAIRO - CONTINUED

10

MUSIC continues under.

ERSKINE BLACKWELL  
 The Houdinis' guide took them along  
 the Sharia Mohammed Ali to the  
 ancient mosque of Sultan Hassan,  
 and stopped the motor coach near  
 the tower-flanked Bab-el-Azab.

The motorcoach PULLS TO A STOP at the side of the road.

ABDUL REIS

(barking at the driver in  
Arabic)

ew'af ala ganb ya 7mar!

*Pull over and stop, moron!*

(politely in English)

This is the magnificent Qala 'at  
Salah al-din. Saladin the Great  
built it to protect the city from  
the Crusaders in the 12th century.  
I hope an uphill walk will not be  
too taxing for madame?

HOUDINI

She's tougher than the rest of us,  
Abdul. Don't you worry about her.

BESS

Harry!

ABDUL REIS

(barking at his porters in  
Arabic)

Emshou ya klab! tallau elkhododyat  
we hatoulhom 7aga yeshrabouha!

*Move, you dogs! Take the pillows up  
above and bring plenty for them to  
drink!*

(politely in English)

Please to follow...

The doors of the motorcoach SLAM as they follow Abdul.

ERSKINE BLACKWELL

The guide knew his trade well. They  
circled the modern mosque of  
Mohammed Ali, and looked down from  
the dizzying parapet over mystic  
Cairo, all golden with its carven  
domes, its ethereal minarets, and  
its flaming gardens. And beyond it,  
across the cryptic yellow Nile that  
is the mother of aeons and  
dynasties, lurked the menacing  
sands of the Libyan Desert,  
undulant and iridescent and evil  
with older arcana. And towering  
there over all of it, stood the  
mighty Pyramids of Gizeh.

MUSIC punctuation.

BESS

Magnificent. I've never seen anything which makes me feel such a sense of... time.

HOUDINI

It's fantastic! Abdul, it's a great tour you've led us on. But we must get a closer look at those pyramids!

BESS

Perhaps tomorrow--

ABDUL REIS

We can go now, sir, if you wish it. You will find that time itself waits for the deeper mysteries of primal Egypt - the black Khem of Re and Amen, Isis and Osiris.

HOUDINI

Now that's what I want to see!

BESS

Harry, you're like a little kid! It's adorable.

HOUDINI

Thank you, my desert queen!  
(kisses her)  
Lead on, Abdul!

Music transition.

11 CANOPIC ROOM

11

ERSKINE BLACKWELL

Meanwhile, Professor Nathaniel Ward carried out his work for the Tower Foundation in the Cairo Museum's Canopic Room.

Ward MUTTERS to himself in Ancient Egyptian. The door CREAKS open. Subtle FOOTSTEPS.

NATE WARD

Hmm? Is someone there? Oh, it's you. I'm sorry about before. I... Look, I don't know who your friend is, but you're not supposed to be in here.

(MORE)

NATE WARD (CONT'D)  
 This collection is restricted. You  
 need to go. No, wait! You--

WHACK. Ward slumps to the floor unconscious. MUSICAL STING.

12 PYRAMIDS BY DAY

12

ERSKINE BLACKWELL  
 Leaving the motorcoach at the Mena  
 House Hotel, Abdul Reis al Drogman  
 led the Houdinis toward the  
 celebrated plateau of Gizeh in the  
 most traditional way possible....

Plodding FOOTSTEPS move through the sand.

HOUDINI  
 Really, Bess, is this any way for  
 civilized people to travel?

BESS  
 Don't be a nervous Nellie, Harry.  
 Besides, you look great up there.  
 Hold still, let me take a photo of  
 you.

HOUDINI  
 I would if I knew how to get the  
 bloody beast to stop!

A CAMEL BELCHES and SNORTS.

ABDUL REIS  
 Do not be deceived by the squalor  
 of these poor domiciles we ride  
 past. A most excellent vista awaits  
 as we round this corner.

HOUDINI  
 I don't know, Abdul, this camel's  
 frightfully awkward...

MUSICAL HIT.

ABDUL REIS  
 The great pyramids!

BESS  
 Oh Harry!

HOUDINI  
 Breathtaking!



ABDUL REIS

First we shall ride to the mysterious sphinx for a closer look. Then we shall examine the pyramids.

The CAMELS SQUAWK as the group changes course.

BESS

Abdul, which pharaoh built the sphinx?

ABDUL REIS

No pharaoh, madam. The sphinx is from an age before the pharaohs, before the pyramids. It is something fearfully ancient. Behold!

DRAMATIC HIT as they see it.

HOUDINI

(truly awed)

Look at it Bess. It's monstrous.

BESS

It's... eerie. There's almost... I don't know how to put it. The smile...

The DISTANT NOISE OF WORKMEN.

HOUDINI

Say, who are those fellows down there?

ABDUL REIS

German archeologists, effendi. They are hoping to enter a temple below the sphinx.

HOUDINI

Can we go talk to them? Ich spreche ein wenig Deutsch!

ABDUL REIS

You wish to speak with Germans, effendi? Are you not... American? Germany is not so friendly with America just now I think.

HOUDINI

Well listen to him, Bess. He's a politician!

ABDUL REIS

I am but a humble man, effendi. But in Egypt, even the humblest must be politicians, and mind to whom they speak.

BESS

Well don't worry, Abdul, everybody's friendly with my husband. You'll see.

ABDUL REIS

As you wish, madame. However, the Germans may not be so friendly with me. With your permission, effendi, I shall remain here with the animals. Your hand, madame Houdini.

BESS

Thank you.

She PLOPS down from her camel.

HOUDINI

Chin up, Abdul. We'll have a look around and be back before you can say Ottoman Empire!

ABDUL REIS

Yes, effendi.

The Houdinis move quickly over the sand. WIND BLOWS and the SOUNDS OF DIGGING and GERMANS SHOUTING at Arabs draws closer.

BESS

Why do you suppose he thinks the Germans wouldn't like him?

HOUDINI

Who knows? With the British and the French and the Germans and the Turks and the Khedive... everybody wants a piece of Egypt.

BESS

Maybe... There's something about that Abdul that I just can't quite--

HOUDINI

Look at that wall there, Bess! Rodrigo could paint us up a backdrop just like that for the "Under the Pyramids" act. Take a photo.

CLICK.

BESS

"Under the Pyramids"... I don't think that's the right title.

HOUDINI

Nonsense. Here, it looks like we can just climb over this fence.

BESS

Harry, no, the guards...

Two guards RUN TOWARDS THEM.

GUARD

(in German)

Hier ist kein Zutritt. Der Zugang ist für Touristen gesperrt.  
*Sir, you can't come in here. It's closed for tourists.*

HOUDINI

(theatrically)

Ich bin Houdini.

OTHER GUARD

(in German)

Sie sind Houdini? Der Zauberkünstler?  
*You're Houdini? The magician?*

GUARD

(German)

Dürfte ich um ein Autogramm bitten, Herr Houdini?  
*Could I have your autograph, Houdini?*

HOUDINI

(German)

Aber natürlich.  
*But of course.*

BESS

Uh-oh, this must be the boss coming over.

LUDWIG BORCHARDT storms across the dig site. He is a renowned German archeologist in his 50s and in charge of the dig.

BORCHARDT

(snippy German)

Was ist denn hier los?

(MORE)

BORCHARDT (CONT'D)

Machen Sie sich wieder an die Arbeit, ihr zwei.  
*What's going on here? Get back to work, you two.*

GUARD

(German)

Herr Direktor, das ist Harry Houdini. Der Zauberkünstler.  
*Sir, this is Harry Houdini. The magician.*

BORCHARDT

Houdini? You are Houdini?

HOUDINI

(in German)

Zu Ihren Diensten, Herr Direktor.  
*At your service, sir.*

(English)

And my wife, Beatrice.

BORCHARDT

Mein Herr. Gnädige, Frau. I am Ludwig Borchardt, director of the German Archeological Institute here in Cairo. I apologize for my appearance but we...

HOUDINI

Nonsense, my good man. You're hard at work. Our guide brought us out to the Sphinx and we thought we'd take a closer look.

BORCHARDT

Who is your guide?

HOUDINI

Oh, he's just some Arab. Dupuis over at the museum set us up with him.

BESS

Don't let us interrupt you.

BORCHARDT

No, no. It is not often we have such famous visitors. Please, come with me - I shall show you about.

He helps them into the dig site and they stroll about the sphinx.

HOUDINI

Herr Borchardt, our guide said the sphinx is older than the pyramids?

BORCHARDT

Oh my, yes. You see, the pyramids were built from stones cut elsewhere, brought to this place by slaves. But the sphinx, it is carved directly from the rock of this plateau. It is a part of the land itself.

HOUDINI

That's amazing. What does it represent? Some kind of creature? A god?

BORCHARDT

If only we knew, Herr Houdini. That is its mystery. There are legends among the Arabs that it had another face before this one you see - a face ancient and terrible. It is said the Pharaoh Khephren ordered his own face to be put there in its place, so men could look upon it without fear.

BESS

Khephren. He was married to Nitocris?

BORCHARDT

Very good, madame. Here, come close. See the writing? It is the emblem of Re-Harakhte, the Sun god. A century ago, scholars found this mark, and thought it was the name of the sphinx.

(laughing)

But the sphinx stood here for thousands of years before this symbol was put here. The sphinx was nearly buried by the desert, but a pharaoh ordered that it be fully restored.

HOUDINI

Why's that?

BORCHARDT

(excited)

Interesting story.

(MORE)

BORCHARDT (CONT'D)

I translated it from the Dream Stele at the National Museum. It says that a young prince was out on a hunting trip and stopped to rest under the head of the sphinx, which at that time was buried to the neck in sand. He fell asleep and dreamed that the Sphinx told him if he would clear away all the sand, he would be the next pharaoh.

BESS

Let me guess, he did and he took the throne?

BORCHARDT

Indeed, Frau Houdini. He became the Pharaoh Thutmosis IV, of the 18th dynasty. There are very superstitious people in Egypt who believe that the sphinx is an entity older than all the gods. They say it is the source of all mysteries and power.

HOUDINI

Hmm, that gives a new meaning to its smile, eh Bess? What other mysteries, Herr Borchardt? Mysteries are my business.

BORCHARDT

That's what our excavation is exploring. There's a temple beneath the sphinx and we have found passages leading deep under the plateau. We have had to erect a metal gate leading to some of the passages to keep our discoveries from getting out... I mean, to keep people out of our discoveries...

BESS

How far into the ground does it go?

There's the sound of commotion in the distance. Germans YELLING at Arabs and vice versa. A guard RUNS up.

GUARD

(in German)

Herr Direktor, der Boden hinter den Metalltüren ist eingebrochen. Nour ist in einen tiefen Schacht gefallen.

(MORE)

GUARD (CONT'D)

Er sagt, er hätte sich das Bein gebroche.  
*Sir, a floor has given way inside the metal doors. It leads to a shaft that goes very, very deep. I think Nour has broken his leg.*

BORCHARDT

(in German)

Ja, ja, ich komme sofort. Holen Sie den Mann raus und verschliessen Sie die Türen auf der Stelle. Und besorgen Sie mehr Arbeiter zum Schaufeln.

*Yes, yes, I'll be right there. Get him out and lock the doors first. Bring in more of the diggers!*

(in English)

My apologies, an emergency at the site. It was a pleasure to make your acquaintance. Gnädige Frau. Herr Houdini.

Borchardt and the Guard go.

HOUDINI

Gleichfalls, Herr Borchardt.

Bess and Harry walk back towards Abdul Reis and the camels.

BESS

I couldn't make it out. What happened at the dig?

HOUDINI

He spoke pretty fast. A floor gave way and opened up a shaft that led deep underground...

MUSICAL SEGUE.

ERSKINE BLACKWELL

Leaving the sphinx behind them, the Houdinis returned to their camels and guide. They rode past Cyclopean masonry and looked down ahead into a valley beyond which the eternal Nile glistened to the east, and the eternal desert shimmered to the west.

(MORE)

ERSKINE BLACKWELL (CONT'D)

The great pyramid loomed over them, showing its rough bulk of great stones, while the others retained here and there the neatly fitted covering which had made them smooth and finished in their day.

BESS

Abdul, did they build Cairo to be near the pyramids or were the pyramids built to be near Cairo?

ABDUL REIS

An excellent question, good lady. In the dynasties of the old pharaohs, there was no Cairo. The great city was Memphis, south from here. Khufu, second pharaoh of the fourth dynasty, chose this plateau for his tomb - the greatest monument which man has ever built or shall ever build.

HOUDINI

I'll say. All this just for one man's grave.

ABDUL REIS

There was nothing more important to our people than the afterlife. When the body can lie eternally, one could say that even death may die.

HOUDINI

Just how big are they, Abdul?

ABDUL REIS

The great pyramid stands at 450 feet. At the ground, each side is 750 feet.

BESS

Wait, why is this called the Great Pyramid? The one behind it looks even taller.

HOUDINI

A trick of the eye, my dear. Am I right, Abdul?

ABDUL REIS

Yes, Houdini, sir. The rock beneath the second pyramid is some thirty feet higher.



HOUDINI

It's built at a steeper angle too.  
See?

BESS

Ah yes.

ABDUL REIS

It was built by Khufu's son, the  
pharaoh Khephren. And the third,  
the Pyramid of King Mycerinus, is  
the most small of the three. Come,  
please to dismount.

The Houdinis GET OFF THEIR CAMELS again. Some scruffy Bedouin  
pitch men RUN UP to the group.

PYRAMID CLIMBER ONE

(in Arabic)

Ya basha, ana momoken atla'alak  
elahram - ana 7amel elrakam  
elkeyasi, sabaa' daaye' tale'  
nazel.

*Hey mister, I climb the great  
pyramid for you - what a show. I am  
record holder - seven minutes up  
and down.*

PYRAMID CLIMBER TWO

(in Arabic)

La ana 7atla'alak, Nos eltaman,  
khamas da'aye' we eshreen sanyah.  
*No, let me do it for you. Half  
price. I hold real record - five  
minutes and seventeen seconds.*

The climbers continue to SNARK AT EACH OTHER and PITCH THEIR  
SERVICES.

ABDUL REIS

(in Arabic to climbers)

Ekhrassou ya klab!  
*Silence, dogs!*

HOUDINI

What do these filthy savages want,  
Abdul?

ABDUL REIS

They are offering to climb the  
pyramids for you. To show you how  
fast it can be done. For enough  
baksheesh these dogs will undertake  
almost anything.

BESS

How long does it take?

ABDUL REIS

This one claims he can do it in seven minutes.

PYRAMID CLIMBER ONE

(in English)

Seven minutes, madam!

ABDUL REIS

This one says he can do it in five. But it costs more.

BESS

I think I'd like to see that.

ABDUL REIS

May I suggest madam, that you will find it more to your liking if I lead you to the top myself.

HOUDINI

A capital idea, Abdul!

ABDUL REIS

Come, have water first then follow me.

They climb the pyramid. MUSIC CLIMBS BRIEFLY THEN FLOURISHES grandly throughout this section.

ERSKINE BLACKWELL

With the encouragement and assistance of the mysterious Abdul, the Houdinis mounted the limestone blocks, each itself three to four feet high, like the steps of a staircase built for the gods. Their arduous effort was abundantly rewarded with a view of unprecedented magnificence, which included not only remote and glittering Cairo with its crowned citadel background of gold-violet hills, but all the lesser pyramids of the Memphian district as well, from Abu Roash on the north to Dashur on the south.

MUSIC FLOURISH.

ABDUL REIS

Sir, madame, I give you - Egypt!

BESS

Oh, Harry, it's fantastic.

HOUDINI

It's... words fail me. The immensity. The antiquity.

BESS

Those pyramids. The things that must be in them... under them.

HOUDINI

I'm awestruck. This - this is what the new act should feel like. Everyone should have the chance to feel this.

ERSKINE BLACKWELL

After soaking in this breathtaking sight, the party made its laborious way back down the antediluvian mountain of stone.

The MUSIC SWELLS and gives us a transition to the bottom of the pyramid.

ABDUL REIS

Nearly there now. Mind your step, madame.

Houdini JUMPS OFF THE LAST BLOCK AND LANDS IN THE SAND.

HOUDINI

I tell you, Abdul, I think getting down this thing was harder than going up. How are you doing, my dear?

BESS

I'm tired, I don't mind admitting that. Maybe we should--

Unwashed bedouin pitch men run up to Houdini including ALI ZIZ.

ALI ZIZ

(in Arabic)

Ya basha, momken akhdak ma'aya  
re7la motheera fe mamrat ta7t haram  
elmalek Khufu?

(MORE)

ALI ZIZ (CONT'D)

*Sir, may I entreat you to join me for a thrilling excursion into the subterranean passages beneath the pyramid of King Khufu?*

TASTELESS BEDUOIN

(in Arabic)

Ya Basha. ana 7awareek elmamarat elserrya lelfarana. 7addek khasm gamed gedan.

*Sir, I will show you the secret passageways of the pharaohs. I give you very special discount.*

IMPORTANTATE BEDUOIN

(in Arabic)

Taal maaya, ana bas elly ya'raf elmamarrat dih...

*Come with me sir, only I know the very secret tunnels beneath the pyramids...*

BESS

Oh, Harry, what do they want?

HOUDINI

I don't--

ABDUL REIS

They want to show you the passages beneath the pyramids, madame.

BESS

Oh, no I couldn't possibly...

ABDUL REIS

(bellowing in Arabic)

Erga'ou ya klab! Seebou elzeboun fe7aloh!

*Get back, you dogs! Leave my clients in peace!*

BESS

Oh!

HOUDINI

Oh, now there's no need to--

ALI ZIZ

(in Arabic)

Ezzay leek aeyn tigi hena ya Abdul Reis?

*You have some nerve to come around here, Abdul Reis!*

ABDUL REIS

(in Arabic)

Ekhrass Ali Aziz, yelan deen ommak  
ya kalb!  
*Silence, Ali Ziz. Damn your  
mother's religion, dog!*

HOUDINI

(quietly to Bess)

Clearly some bad blood here.

BESS

I don't like it one bit!

ALI ZIZ

(in Arabic)

yelan ro7 ahlak!  
*Damn your dead ancestors!*

ABDUL REIS

(Arabic)

tet7ere'!  
*Go to hell!*

ALI ZIZ

(Arabic)

Yabn elkalb!  
*Your mother committed adultery with  
a monkey!*

ABDUL REIS

(Arabic)

Ya gazma!  
*A shoe is on your head, Ali Ziz!*

ALI ZIZ

Aaaaah!

Ali Ziz runs at Abdul Reis and they grapple. The Bedouins SHOUT enthusiastically.

BESS

Oh Harry, someone will get hurt!

HOUDINI

(loud and bold)

Gentlemen, gentlemen, enough.  
Please. Break it up.

A SHOCKED ARABIC AD LIB ensues as the Bedouins are stunned by his intervention.

HOUDINI (CONT'D)

(to Ali Ziz)

Your tarbush, sir.

(to Abdul)

Abdul...

ABDUL REIS

Thank you, Houdini, sir.

ALI ZIZ

(Arabic)

E7na lessa 7anetabel ya Abdul Reis.

Eleyla 7ankammelha! Methak

elsharaf!

*This isn't over, Abdul Reis.*

*Tonight we finish it! I demand the  
pact of honor!*

ABDUL REIS

(Arabic)

Methak esharaf! ana mowafek!

*The Pact of Honor. Agreed!*

KNOT OF BEDUOINS

(in Arabic in unison)

Methak esharaf!

*The Pact of Honor!*

ABDUL REIS

(to Houdini in English)

Come. We go.

They move away from the murmuring band of unsavory Bedouins.

HOUDINI

What was that all about?

ABDUL REIS

An ancient argument, effendi.

Madame. My apologies.

BESS

It certainly ended quickly.

ABDUL REIS

I beg your pardon, Madame Houdini,  
but it has not ended. We agreed to  
a very ancient custom of Cairo.

Tonight this man, Ali Ziz, and I  
will fight each other in the

(in Arabic)

"Methak esharaf!".

*"Pact of honor."*

(MORE)

ABDUL REIS (CONT'D)  
(in English)  
how do you say - a duel.

HOUDINI  
That seems awfully civilized.

ABDUL REIS  
Honor demands it. This we will do  
on top of the Great Pyramid at  
midnight. We will both bring five  
men as "seconds", yes? All fair  
fight, western rules of boxing.

HOUDINI  
Good heavens. What a spectacle that  
will be!

BESS  
Oh, well I hope you're victorious,  
Abdul.

ABDUL REIS  
Thank you, madame. Begging your  
pardon, I must now go summon the  
men who will stand behind me for  
the fight.

BESS  
That's all right. I noticed a  
tourist trolley at the Mena House  
hotel. We can take that back into  
the city, and you can go on about  
your business. Harry?

HOUDINI  
(hesitant)  
Yes, of course... Abdul! I know it  
may seem out of place, but might I  
be of service as one of your  
seconds?

BESS  
Harry!

HOUDINI  
I do feel somewhat responsible,  
having interfered in the first  
place.

BESS  
Harry, it's none of our affair.

ABDUL REIS

It would indeed be a great honor to me...

HOUDINI

You see, my dear?

BESS

Harry, this isn't some stage show.

ABDUL REIS

...but your wife is right, sir. There are dangers.

HOUDINI

I'm not afraid of danger.

ABDUL REIS

You are a Westerner. No one will think you are shameful or weak to avoid this. My people will understand this fighting is not for Houdini.

HOUDINI

Well that does it. Now I insist on joining you!

MUSICAL STING.

13

SHEPHEARD'S HOTEL - NIGHT

13

ERSKINE BLACKWELL

Back in their room at Shepheard's Hotel, Bess expressed her grave concerns.

Transition music. The RUMBLE of the motorcoach gives way to the sound of a hefty hotel room DOOR CLOSING.

BESS

Harry, you can't be serious about attending this fight!

HOUDINI

Why wouldn't I be? It'll be a hoot!

BESS

Alone at midnight with a bunch of street ruffians? You saw how crazy they were.



HOUDINI

I know how to fight. You know I used to box with my brother Dash.

BESS

It's not the same thing and you know it!

HOUDINI

I've been through a lot worse than this. This is child's play. Watching some bedouins knock each other around atop the great pyramid in the moonlight? No, my dear, it's just too good to pass up.

BESS

There's something about that guide. He's hiding something. The way he avoided those German archeologists?

HOUDINI

Plenty of people don't get on with Germans, Bess.

BESS

It's fishy. I don't like it, Harry.

HOUDINI

You know perfectly well I can take care of myself.

BESS

Take Rodrigo.

HOUDINI

Hah!

BESS

At least let me ring down to the concierge and have them send a reporter with you. Someone who can--

HOUDINI

No! I don't need a baby sitter. And I'll be deuced if I let some Arab pass himself off as braver or more honorable than Houdini. This will all be a lark, my dear. You worry much too much.

BESS

Harry, I love you, but mark my words: something terrible is going to happen. I can feel it.

MUSIC transition.

14 PYRAMIDS BY NIGHT

14

The soundscape follow's Blackwell's narration.

ERSKINE BLACKWELL

Soothing his wife's concerns with a tender kiss good night, Houdini went with Abdul Reis al Drogman that night and joined a select and formidable band of congenial cutthroats as his pugilistic background.

Drogman's party, mounted on donkeys, embarked for Gizeh. As they approached the famed plateau, they passed the last of the returning tourists, saluted the last in-bound trolley-car, avoided the dozing policemen, and were alone with the night and the past and the spectral moon.

The sound of DONKEYS walking in the sand, and a desert BREEZE.

HOUDINI

(quietly)

It's amazing, Abdul. What a sight! The pyramids by moonlight. They have a ghoulish menace that one just doesn't see in the daytime.

ABDUL REIS

Yes, effendi. They truly stir the heart.

HOUDINI

Thank you for letting me come along.

ABDUL REIS

Thank you for insisting. You will not forget this night.

HOUDINI

Say, what's that ahead?

ABDUL REIS

Ali Ziz and his men are already here. What you see are his donkeys, outlined against the desert at Kafrel-Haram.

HOUDINI

Well let's not keep them waiting, eh? C'mon!

He SLAPS his donkey with the reins and it BRAYS and trots a little faster.

ERSKINE BLACKWELL

Leaving their mounts behind in the squalid Arab settlement, Houdini and Drogman's men went up the rocks and over the sand to the Great Pyramid, and eagerly climbed again its time-worn sides.

As most travellers know, the actual apex of the great pyramid has long been worn away, leaving a reasonably flat platform twelve yards square. On this eerie pinnacle a squared circle was formed, Ali Ziz's men on one side, Abdul Reis' on the other. A sort of referee initiated the process.

KAREEM

(in Arabic)

Ali Aziz, arrab. Reggaltoh  
teshaggao!  
*Ali Ziz, come forward.*

His men give a CHEER for him.

KAREEM (CONT'D)

(Arabic)

Abdul Reis, enta kaman.  
*Abdul Reis, you too.*

Houdini and a couple of other men give a SHOUT of support.

KAREEM (CONT'D)

(Arabic)

Entou taarafou elkawaed, gahzeen?  
Ebtedou!  
*You know the rules. Ready? Begin!*

The men fight each CHEERED ON by their supporters.

HOUDINI

Come on, Abdul, bob and weave.  
That's it. Jab. Jab again. Don't  
back off, you've got him scared  
now. Work the body. That's it. Go  
on. He's not even trying! You've  
got him, etc...

The CHEERING RISES TO A CRESCENDO.

HOUDINI (CONT'D)

What? That's it? Yes, Abdul Reis,  
he's our man!

The VIGOROUS ARABIC AD LIBS mark the fight's end and a swift  
reconciliation.

KAREEM

(in Arabic)

Elfayez hoa Abdul Reis Al Drogman  
*Abdul Reis Al Drogman wins the  
fight.*

ABDUL REIS

It is done now. I am the victor.

HOUDINI

It didn't seem like much of a  
scrape at all. What, is everyone  
making tea now? Extraordinary!

ABDUL REIS

It is our way. Tea, Houdini?

HOUDINI

Please.

They pour him tea over a BARRAGE OF ARABIC AD LIBS including  
the words "Houdini" "handcuff" and "magician".

ABDUL REIS

(a shade darker)

They wish me to ask you if it is  
true you are creating a new trick  
from your experience here in Egypt?

HOUDINI

I am. It's going to be a  
blockbuster. I'm thinking it'll be  
called, "Under the Pyramids".

ABDUL REIS

(in Arabic)

Beoul elkhedaa elgedida esmaha "Fee  
zel elahramat"

*He says his new trick will be  
called "Under the Pyramids".*

The BEDOUINS HOOT with ironic and ominous laughter.

HOUDINI

What? They don't like it? Bess  
didn't like it either. Maybe

(dramatically)

"Imprisoned with the Pharaohs"!

ABDUL REIS

(darkly bemused)

Yes. This is much better.

HOUDINI

This tea is interesting. I don't...  
Wait. I know that fellow over  
there.

(to Al Massri)

You were at the museum. What's your  
name?

AL MASSRI

Ansep Al Massri. You will not  
forget it again. Yes, I was there.

MUSIC STING AND TENSION. Tense pause.

HOUDINI

Alright, something's not right with  
all of this. What's going--

ABDUL REIS

(shouting in Arabic)

Khodouh!

*Now! Take him!*

MUSIC STING. There's a great KERFUFFLE as the Arabs fall on  
Houdini.

ERSKINE BLACKWELL

Suddenly the entire band of  
Bedouins attacked our hero! He  
struggled at first, but soon saw  
that one man, even a Houdini, could  
make no headway against a band of  
over twenty sinewy barbarians.

(MORE)

ERSKINE BLACKWELL (CONT'D)

His hands were tied behind his back, his knees bent to their fullest extent, and his wrists and ankles stoutly linked together with unyielding cords.

HOUDINI

Damn you, untie me! Gaah--

ABDUL REIS

A gag will keep him quiet. Bind his eyes and take him down.

The Arabs pick Houdini up and start their descent of the Great pyramid.

DRAMATIC MUSIC.

15

GIZEH TOMB OPENING

15

Houdini is thrown roughly to the ground.

ABDUL REIS

Put him there. Remove his gag and blindfold. No one will hear him now.

HOUDINI

(sputtering to get his breath)

Who are you people? I assure you you'll regret--

WHACK!

ABDUL REIS

Silence!

(to Al Massri)

Remove the hoods of the other blasphemers.

The hoods are pulled off dramatically. STING.

NATE WARD

Houdini! Why di--

SMACK!

DUPUIS

Help! I am--

WHACK!

HOUDINI

Mssr. Dupuis! Nate Ward! You savages, what are you--

ABDUL REIS

Speak no more, dog!

Al Massri SLUGS Houdini.

ABDUL REIS (CONT'D)

My faithful servants have told me what you plan to do: to further defile the final resting place and the sacred body of my queen, she who is mightier in death. Nitocris!

AL MASSRI, ALI ZIZ ET AL

(in Egyptian)

Iä, NEET-iker-et henoot wenemoo mootoo!

Iä, KHA-ef-rah, wer, nesoot bity!  
*Hail Nitocris, mistress of the eaters of the dead!*

*Hail great Khephren, ruler of upper and lower Egypt!*

ABDUL REIS

So, Houdini, you are famous for your magic and escapes. Now you shall come to know the true magic. Of the hidden powers and forces that live in this land, that live beyond death. This time for you there shall be no escape!

(in Egyptian)

Iä, hemes er kheri!

Ded en enek aabet ten!

*Hail to the Dweller Beneath!*

*Unto thee we give this sacrifice!*

AL MASSRI, ALI ZIZ ET AL

(in Egyptian)

Iä, KHA-ef-rah ia neb tem tee fee moot!

Iä, NEET-iker-et, henut mesha iutee moot!

*Hail Khephren, hail to the deathless lord.*

*Hail Nitocris, queen of the deathless legion.*

HOUDINI

What are they saying, Nate?

NATE WARD  
They're addressing him as Khephren.

HOUDINI  
Him? Khephren?

NATE WARD  
He does look just like the statue  
in--

ABDUL REIS  
I am a mere tour guide, Abdul Reis  
Al Drogman.

HOUDINI  
Good lord, this was a big frame-up  
all along! But what about these  
men?

ABDUL REIS  
Yes, what about them?

DUPUIS  
Let me go. I'm a government  
official. I've done nothing!

ABDUL REIS  
Nothing? Dupuis, you would sell  
holy relics for a few coins to prop  
up your sad museum. And you--

NATE WARD  
Yes?

ABDUL REIS  
Hmph. You know too much.

NATE WARD  
(under his breath)  
Story of my life.

ABDUL REIS  
Blindfold them! Gag them! And lower  
them down. The Guardian of the  
Temple waits to receive them.

The Arabs fall on Houdini, Ward and Dupuis as Abdul Reis  
CHUCKLES WITH GLEE.

Ominous MUSIC.



16 THE SHAFT

16

SFX of bumps and scrapes as rope is played out under the narration. Dupuis WHIMPERS in terror.

## ERSKINE BLACKWELL

The gloating Bedouin cultists dragged their bound captives a few feet to a ragged opening in the ground, and pushed them over the side, lowering them on mighty ropes. For apparent eons they bumped against the stony irregular sides of the narrow hewn well, down, down, down into Stygian darkness. The horror of the experience deepened with every dragging second. That any descent through the sheer solid rock could be so vast without reaching the core of the planet itself, seemed all but beyond belief. Finally, after what felt like an eternity, the three men once again felt solid ground beneath them.

17 THE TOMB

17

There's a meaty THUD as each of the bound men hits the floor, followed by the SOUND OF STRUGGLING as one of them fights his constraints. Houdini works the gag out of his mouth.

## HOUDINI

Are you there? Professor Ward?

A muffled ASSENT.

## HOUDINI (CONT'D)

Mssr. Dupuis?

A FEEBLE MOAN from much further away.

## HOUDINI (CONT'D)

You can work the gags out of your mouth. Push your lower lip as high as it will go. Then jut it out and lower your jaw.

The gagged men STRUGGLE with this. There's SPATTERING as Nate Ward completes the task and GASPS for air. Dupuis continues to try.

NATE WARD  
Got it. It's off.

HOUDINI  
Good man. Where are we?

NATE WARD  
We're not far from the pyramid, I'd guess one of the burial shafts but I don't know of any as deep as this.

A strange HISSING sound begins.

HOUDINI  
Dupuis, are you--

NATE WARD  
What's that sound?

ROPE plummets downward onto the bound men.

HOUDINI  
It's the rope! They're dropping it on us.

DUPUIS SQUEALS as rope piles onto him.

NATE WARD  
Oh no. We'll be buried in it!

The ROPES FALL on them, piling up in supernatural amounts. It's LOUD and FRIGHTENING.

NATE WARD (CONT'D)  
Houdini!

ERSKINE BLACKWELL  
The falling rope began to pile up about and upon the men, continuing as no rope of normal length could possibly do. It gained in momentum and became an avalanche of hemp, accumulating mountainously on the floor and half burying them beneath its swiftly multiplying coils. Soon they were completely engulfed and gasping for breath as the increasing convolutions submerged and stifled them!

HOUDINI  
 (with great difficulty)  
 God in heaven! How deep are we? I  
 can't...

HOUDINI GROANS and faints as they're buried as the SOUND  
 reaches a CRESCENDO!

SILENCE. Movement. Effort. Another effort off in the  
 distance.

NATE WARD  
 Houdini? Is that you?

DUPUIS SQUEAKS UNCLEARLY into his gag.

NATE WARD (CONT'D)  
 Dupuis? Are you alright?

DUPUIS cries softly.

NATE WARD (CONT'D)  
 Houdini? Houdini! I think he's  
 unconscious.

A LOW RUMBLE of A CREATURE echoes through the darkness.  
 DUPUIS continues to MEEP.

NATE WARD (CONT'D)  
 Shhhh! Quiet, I think there's  
 something there.

There's clearly SOMETHING THERE. The BREATHING gets louder.  
 The clicking of CLAWS ECHOES of the stone floor. DUPUIS  
 SQUEALS in fear.

NATE WARD (CONT'D)  
 (sotto voce)  
 Quiet.

The BREATHING IS LOUD now and near Dupuis who WHIMPERS. The  
 THING GROWLS and PUSHES THROUGH THE ROPES TO DUPUIS' BOUND  
 BODY. Dupuis' gag comes off.

DUPUIS  
 (in French)  
 Sainte Mère de Dieu, non!  
*Blessed mother of god, no!*

There's a LOUDER SOUND as the TOMB GUARDIAN lifts up the  
 bound Dupuis. We hear the HEAVY FOOTSTEPS as the Guardian  
 carries DUPUIS off in the darkness.

DUPUIS (CONT'D)  
 Please god, no! Help me! Ward!  
 Houdini! Someone!  
 (in French)  
 Je vais mourir. Je vais mourir!  
*I'm going to die. I'm going to die!*

As the FOOTSTEPS FADE AWAY Ward breathes heavily. HOUDINI GROANS and moves a little.

NATE WARD  
 (hushed)  
 Houdini? Houdini, can you hear me?  
 Wake up, dammit!

HOUDINI  
 Ward, is that you? What happened?

NATE WARD  
 You... passed out, I don't know. We  
 have to get out of here. There's  
 something down here. I think it  
 carried off Dupuis.  
 (struggling against ropes)  
 I just can't get these ropes to  
 budge...

HOUDINI  
 Well I can! Hold on.

HOUDINI WRESTLES AGAINST HIS ROPES. Clearly he's making progress.

NATE WARD  
 Wait, how are you...

HOUDINI  
 I never reveal a secret, old boy,  
 but...

Houdini STRAINS and there's the unpleasant SOUND of HOUDINI'S SHOULDER DISLOCATING.

HOUDINI (CONT'D)  
 Nearly there now. Aha! Now it's  
 your turn. Where are--

NATE WARD  
 Here.

HOUDINI  
 Damn all this rope. Ah, here we go.

Houdini swiftly unties Nate who WRIGGLES FREE.

NATE WARD

Finally, get this blindfold off -  
my god, there's no light at all  
down here.

HOUDINI

Can't see a thing.

NATE WARD

Wait. Yes, those devils took my  
Fleur-de-Lys, but they didn't take  
this.

He OPENS his lighter and STRIKES THE FLINT. STING.

NATE WARD (CONT'D)

Good heavens, Houdini, you're a  
wreck. The cuts, bruises...

HOUDINI

You're not looking great yourself.  
I'm sure we were all scraped up as  
they lowered us into this hell  
hole.

NATE WARD

Your shoulder. It's out of the  
socket.

HOUDINI

Ah yes, comes with the territory.  
Here, give my elbow a good shove,  
will you.

The joint CLUNKS back into place.

HOUDINI (CONT'D)

Sorry, Bess usually does that for  
me. If only I had listened to her.  
Ah, much better. This whole attack,  
they're upset about the stone  
coffin?

NATE WARD

Sarcophagus. Yes, and the mummy of  
the Ghoul Queen.

HOUDINI

Ghoul Queen? You didn't mention  
that part.

NATE WARD

I hate to disagree with you, but  
yes I did.

(MORE)

NATE WARD (CONT'D)  
Superstitions and folklore can be  
incredibly powerful forces among  
those who believe in them.

HOUDINI  
Abdul Reis al Drogman.

NATE WARD  
That name is an obvious fake. In  
Arabic that would be "the servant  
of a person in authority who leads  
tourists".

HOUDINI  
And I fell for it. Me! It was a  
masterful misdirection. I saw just  
what he wanted me to see. Bess was  
right all along.

NATE WARD  
His followers called him Khephren.

HOUDINI  
He played tour guide all day just  
so they could drop me down a well?  
They're probably waiting to ambush  
us as soon as we find the exit.

NATE WARD  
I think there's more to it than  
that.

HOUDINI  
What do you mean?

NATE WARD  
Well I don't often hear Ancient  
Egyptian spoken out loud, but he  
said something about a sacrifice.

HOUDINI  
(after a pause)  
Oh.

NATE WARD  
There was a creature or... some  
kind of thing came for Dupuis.

HOUDINI  
What kind of thing?

NATE WARD  
I don't know. Here, look! This is  
where he was. There's more rope.  
(MORE)

NATE WARD (CONT'D)  
 This piece was torn, or bitten off.  
 Ow, the lighter's too hot to keep  
 holding.

He BLOWS OUT THE FLAME. The ominous sound of a TOMB GUARDIAN  
 moving somewhere in the darkness.

NATE WARD (CONT'D)  
 (sotto)  
 Whatever it is, it's still down  
 here.

HOUDINI  
 Time to make an escape.

NATE WARD  
 Dupuis was still alive when the  
 thing took him.

HOUDINI  
 (with resolve)  
 Then we find him, work our way out  
 of this place, and damn these  
 savages.

He strides boldly forward.

HOUDINI (CONT'D)  
 Nate? Are you there?

NATE WARD  
 Over here.

HOUDINI  
 It's impossible in this darkness.

Ward STRIKES THE FLINT of his lighter. A bit of rope SIZZLES.

NATE WARD  
 Well, it's not a torch, but this  
 rope burns. It'll give us a little  
 light. Take this one.

HOUDINI  
 It's like trying to find your way  
 through Grand Central Station by  
 the light of a cigar.

NATE WARD  
 Look at the smoke. The air's moving  
 to our right.

HOUDINI  
 It must be going somewhere.

NATE WARD

Let's see.

MUSIC.

ERSKINE BLACKWELL

Houdini and Professor Ward cautiously felt their way forward in the all-consuming darkness of a colossal chamber unknown to archeologists.

Their FOOTSTEPS ECHO through the vast room.

NATE WARD

Look, there's a wall ahead.

HOUDINI

Thank god, I thought this room just went on forever. What is this place?

NATE WARD

I thought it was the gateway temple, but now I'm not so sure. Here, look at the wall. There are no joints or stones. This was dug directly out of the rock.

HOUDINI

The air's moving this way. It must lead to an opening.

They move further along the wall.

HOUDINI (CONT'D)

Look, there's writing up here. Hieroglyphics, isn't it? The wall's covered in it.

NATE WARD

(pensive)

Yes.

HOUDINI

What is it? Can you read it?

NATE WARD

This doesn't make sense...

(in Ancient Egyptian)

Roo noo peret em heroo..

(to Houdini)

The book of the deathless dead...



HOUDINI

Deathless? Seems to me these people were obsessed with death and dying.

NATE WARD

Absolutely. To them living beings were whole, but in death, the body and spiritual forces came apart. They believed the body could literally come back to life, so they protected bodies with desperate care, and preserved all the vital organs in canopic jars near the corpse.

HOUDINI

Hence all the mummies?

NATE WARD

Right. Then there was the ka - the person's life force which would remain in the tomb near the body. They thought the ka needed food to sustain itself in the afterlife, so priests and family members left offerings for it in the tombs. It's said the ka could take the body and perform essential duties.

HOUDINI

You mean the mummy? The ka could make the mummies move?

NATE WARD

So they say. The mummies lay there, awaiting the day when Osiris should restore both ka and soul, and lead forth the stiff legions of the dead from the sunken houses of sleep. It was to have been a glorious rebirth but...

HOUDINI

But what? Damn, my rope's burned out.

NATE WARD

Yes, you can see it here with mine. On this panel. See this figure? It's a mummy - some pious wealthy person, properly preserved for the afterlife.

HOUDINI

Almost lifelike...

NATE WARD

Exactly. But look here. This talks of a place, where...

(slowly translating as he goes)

...abyss below where winged kas and soulless mummies join, surrounded by the... I don't know what this means.

HOUDINI

Look at these... human trunks and limbs but topped with...

NATE WARD

Bulls, cats, ibises, crocodiles... They're composite mummies made to mimic the forms of gods...

HOUDINI

They would actually attach human remains to animal remains and make a monstrous..?

NATE WARD

That's what it says. Though no archeologist has ever found one of these... things. Here, these glyphs describe Khephren and Nitocris ruling over a deathless army of these things, far beneath the temple of the Sphinx.

HOUDINI

(sanity leaking out of him)

I saw it. These things. When I fell unconscious.

NATE WARD

What do you mean you saw it?

HOUDINI

Maybe it was that tea they gave me. I saw Khephren, ruling over an army of these horrid hybrids. Nitocris too! And.... My god, Nate, what kind of loathsome abnormality was the Sphinx originally made to represent?

There's a faint SIZZLE as Ward's rope burns out.

NATE WARD  
My rope's burned out too.

A distant CRY echoes faintly through the temple.

HOUDINI  
Shhh!

NATE WARD  
That could be Dupuis.

HOUDINI  
This way!

They move quickly in the dark. Houdini SNIFFS.

HOUDINI (CONT'D)  
Do you smell that? It's strange...  
Spices?

NATE WARD  
Bitumen, naphtha, natron too.  
They're used in the mummification  
process. I've smelled this in  
museums. Stronger than smelling  
salts.

HOUDINI  
It's the smell of death itself.  
(sniffing)  
It's stronger in this direction.

NATE WARD  
You're right. It's...

Both YELL as they fall. MUSIC!

ERSKINE BLACKWELL  
In the darkness, Houdini and Ward  
failed to see the edge of a stone  
staircase, and plummeted headlong  
down the treacherous flight to face  
new horrors...

NATE WARD  
(hushed)  
Houdini! Houdini! Wake up.

Houdini GROANS as he starts to come around.

NATE WARD (CONT'D)

It's me, Nate. You've got to wake up.

HOUDINI

Nate? What happened?

NATE WARD

Some stairs. You... were unconscious again.

HOUDINI

For how long?

NATE WARD

A few minutes. Twenty, at most.

HOUDINI

I see. I'm sorry, Nate. That's not like me. I...

NATE WARD

You've lost blood, that tea may have been drugged, this whole ordeal is... well, it's nothing to be ashamed of. I won't tell anyone you fainted.

HOUDINI

Fainted? I think you mean I was knocked out.

NATE WARD

Yes, of course. What I mean is that your secrets, whatever they may be, are safe with me.

Very faintly, a ritualistic MUSIC wafts through the chamber. It is distant, but approaches.

HOUDINI

I must have hit my head. I hear music. That can't be real.

NATE WARD

No, I hear it too. Flute, sambuke, sistrum, tympanum. They are... the ancient instruments.

HOUDINI

The music's coming this way. I think I see light.

NATE WARD

You're right. Keep to the shadows.

HOUDINI

There's feet, marching. There are torches!

DISTANT FOOTFALLS OF A RHYTHMICALLY MARCHING HORDE echo through the darkness.

ERSKINE BLACKWELL

Down limitless reaches of sunless pavement a spark of light flickered in the malodorous wind, and Houdini and Ward drew behind the enormous circumference of a Cyclopic column to escape the horror that was stalking toward them through gigantic hypostyles of inhuman dread and phobic antiquity.

HOUDINI

My god, Ward. It's just like you said. Look at them!

NATE WARD

No, don't.

MUSIC and CHANTING and the MARCHING OF MANY KINDS OF FEET.

ERSKINE BLACKWELL

It was hideous that footfalls so dissimilar should move in such perfect rhythm. The training of unhallowed thousands of years must lie behind that march of earth's inmost monstrosities... padding, clicking, walking, stalking, rumbling, lumbering, crawling... and all to the abhorrent discords of those mocking instruments.

HOUDINI

God keep the thought of those Arab legends out of my head! They're... they're....

NATE WARD

Mummies without souls. This is the meeting-place of the wandering... the hordes of the devil-cursed pharaonic dead of forty centuries...

HOUDINI  
 (simultaneous)  
 This is a dream. It has to be.

NATE WARD  
 Keep telling yourself that.

The hellish procession of marching mummies draws closer,  
 their DREAD FOOTFALLS AND WEIRD MUSIC LOUDER!

NATE WARD (CONT'D)  
 Houdini - we have to get out of  
 here.

HOUDINI  
 Ward, look at the size of this  
 place. The columns go up to... My  
 god, there's thousands of them,  
 marching. They're going to that  
 opening. It's huge. What's in  
 there, Ward?

NATE WARD  
 I don't want to know!

HOUDINI  
 It's offerings. They're taking  
 offerings. Food. Drink. Oh my god,  
 there's something in there, Ward,  
 something huge.

NATE WARD  
 Houdini, come on, this way.

HOUDINI  
 (losing more sanity)  
 He has a jackal's head. A  
 crocodile...

NATE WARD  
 Don't look!

HOUDINI  
 Walking legs... with no body...

NATE WARD  
 They're taking something else up to  
 the altar at the opening.

A ululant CORPSE GURGLE ARISES FROM THE MUMMIFIED HORDE.

DUPUIS shrieks piteously.

DUPUIS

(in French)

Mon Dieu, je vous en prie, pas ça !  
Non, par pitié !  
*Please, God, no! Mercy, I beg you!*

HOUDINI

(a bit too loud)

It's Dupuis. They've got him. Look,  
it's Abdul Reis!

NATE WARD

Khephren!

HOUDINI

The queen. Nitocris. Half her face,  
eaten away...

ABDUL REIS

(now King Khephren)

Eerer en enek neb iutee moot aabet!  
*To thee, undead lord, we make  
sacrifice.*

MUMMY CHORUS

Eerer en enek neb iutee moot aabet!  
Enedge-kher ek neb nekht en kekee!  
To thee, undead lord, we make  
sacrifice.  
Hail mighty lord of the underworld!

MUSICAL STING.

ERSKINE BLACKWELL

The monstrosities were hailing  
something which had emerged from  
the nauseous aperture to seize the  
hellish fare proffered it. It was  
something quite ponderous,  
something yellowish and hairy, and  
endowed with strange motion....

Ward roughly grabs Houdini, pulling him away.

NATE WARD

I said don't look!  
(shouting)  
Houdini, RUN!!!

The boys make a break for it. SOUNDING AN ALARM, Nitocris  
BELLOWS!

NITOKRIS

(horribly)

Djedoo wah! Kheteb remetchoo  
ankhoo!  
*Blasphemers! Kill the living men!*

MUMMY CHORUS

Djedoo wah! Kheteb remetchoo  
ankhoo!  
*Blasphemers! Kill the living men!*

NATE WARD

Follow me. Don't look back.

They run and the undead madness follows them in echoing pursuit. MUSIC BUILDS TO THRILLING CLIMAX.

HOUDINI

They're gaining on us.

NATE WARD

There should be a passage this way.  
It should be here!

HOUDINI

There's nothing!

NATE WARD

No. This is plaster. It's a false wall. They're common in Egyptian tombs. It must be! If we can just break through...

HOUDINI

Step aside.

Houdini CRASHES into the wall with brute strength. Giant MASONRY BRICKS GIVE WAY.

NATE WARD

Well done. Through here.

They STRUGGLE through the opening.

NATE WARD (CONT'D)

I was right. The passage slopes upwards.

HOUDINI

Agh, that smell. It's death.



NATE WARD  
 (winded, fading)  
 It's naphtha and bitumen... for the  
 mummies....

HOUDINI  
 I'll hold my breath.

GASPS.

NATE WARD  
 Too much. Can't breathe. Can't go  
 on...

Ward SLUMPS to the ground.

HOUDINI  
 We can't stop now.  
 (picking Ward up)  
 We can make it.  
 (weaker)  
 We can make it... can make...

Houdini collapses from the fumes as the MUSIC HITS A DRAMATIC  
 AND SUSPENSEFUL FINALÉ.

19

THE SPHINX AT SUNRISE

19

A METAL DOOR CREAKS AND CLANGS shut. Hushed VOICES SPEAK IN  
 GERMAN. Light SLAPPING as Bess works to revive Houdini.

BESS  
 Harry? Harry can you hear me?

HOUDINI  
 (delirious)  
 My god, legions of them...

BESS  
 Harry, you're safe now.

NATE WARD  
 (exhausted)  
 I knew he'd come 'round.

HOUDINI  
 Hippopotami should not have human  
 hands and carry torches... men  
 should not have the heads of  
 crocodiles....

BESS

It's alright, Harry, you're safe now.

HOUDINI

Bess! Oh my love! Where am I?

BORCHARDT

You're in the courtyard outside the temple of the sphinx.

HOUDINI

But what happened?

BESS

When you didn't come back from your midnight boxing match, Rodrigo and I came to find you.

RODRIGO

Hello, boss. Looks like you had some adventure.

BORCHARDT

Your wife found my men and we organized a search for Herr Houdini. She was quite determined.

HOUDINI

Where did you find me? No offense, Herr Borchardt, but you and your men look like hell.

BORCHARDT

Archeology is dirty work - it's nothing for you to worry about. We found you and Herr Ward inside the locked metal gates and brought you out.

NATE WARD

What about Mssr. Dupuis? Any sign of him?

BORCHARDT

Dupuis? No, we only found you two. Why, was he with you?

NATE WARD

(hemming)

I'm not...

HOUDINI

I thought I heard someone. It might have been him.

BORCHARDT

I will alert my men.

HOUDINI

What about the Arabs? Abdul Reis al Drogman? Ali Ziz? And... who was that other one?

NATE WARD

Al Massri. He works for the museum.

BORCHARDT

My men searched the plateau. There doesn't seem to be anyone here but you. But there was a break-in at the museum late last night.

HOUDINI

What?

BORCHARDT

Ja, they radioed us to say a sarcophagus and a mummy were taken last night. Not valuable pieces, but it is a strange coincidence, no?

NATE WARD

I bet I know what they took. Herr Borchardt, thank you for your help.

HOUDINI

Danke schön, mein herr.

BORCHARDT

It is nothing. Besides, now I can say I helped the great Houdini make his escape from under the pyramids! Farewell, my friends.

He LAUGHS and goes off.

HOUDINI

See, Bess? It's not such a bad title.

BESS

Come on you two... You look like you've been through a war.

They all TRUDGE THROUGH THE SAND.

BESS (CONT'D)

I've got some water stashed just over here.

HOUDINI

By the sphinx?

BESS

As good a place as any. Come, sit. You too, Nate. So what really happened, Harry?

HOUDINI

I should have listened to you, Bess. It was all a setup. The bedouin devils turned on me. They were outraged about me buying the mummy and the...

NATE WARD

Sarcophagus.

HOUDINI

...for the act. They captured me, Ward and Dupuis, tied us up and lowered us down this incredibly deep shaft.

NATE WARD

The rest of it was... well, Dupuis is still missing, but your husband was a hero, Bess.

HOUDINI

Ah now...

NATE WARD

Mrs. Houdini, I'm embarrassed to admit it, but I fainted down there. More than once. If it weren't for your husband, I might have died in that tomb. I don't have his bravery. He's a remarkable man.

BESS

(understanding all shades of Ward's implication)

Thank you, Professor Ward. I know just what you mean.

HOUDINI

Seriously, Bess, there's things down there. Monstrous. It came out of this opening, like the paw of, well like a giant living sphinx. It was the spirit of Egypt itself.

BESS

Harry...

HOUDINI

Nate? You saw it. Back me up here.

NATE WARD

I think maybe you had too much of that Egyptian tea. It was just a dream.

HOUDINI

It was no dream. Look at the cuts on your...

NATE WARD

Bumping around in the dark of an ancient tomb. I probably knocked my head against a wall.

HOUDINI

No, dammit--

NATE WARD

Never reveal a secret, Houdini. You, of all people, should know that magic is best left unexplained.

20

CONCLUSION

20

ERSKINE BLACKWELL

You've been listening to H.P. Lovecraft's "Imprisoned with the Pharaohs," brought to you by our sponsor, Bub-L-Pep.

BUB-L-PEP SINGERS

(singing)

*That's Bub-L-Pep! Let us pour you some!  
The L is for lithium-yum-yum!*

Keep a spring in your step with the nerve-*alicious* taste of Bub-L-Pep.

(MORE)

## BUB-L-PEP SINGERS (CONT'D)

Until next week, this is Erskine Blackwell reminding you to never go anywhere alone; if it looks bad, don't look; and save the last bullet for yourself.

## ANNOUNCER

"Imprisoned with the Pharaohs " was adapted for radio and produced by Sean Branney and Andrew Leman. Original music by Troy Sterling Nies. The Dark Adventure Ensemble featured: Leslie Baldwin, Aidan Branney, Sean Branney, Dan Conroy, Chad Fifer, Alaine Kashian, Jacob Lyle, Andrew Leman, Barry Lynch, David Pavao, Josh Thoemke, Eddy Will and Time Winters. Tune in next week for "The Toad Legions of Empress Ming," a thrilling tale by Natasha Plew Mimsy. Dark Adventure Radio Theatre is a production of the HPLHS Broadcasting Group, a subsidiary of HPLHS, Inc., copyright 1931...plus eighty-three.

Radio STATIC and fade out.