

Fulfillment

by Will Garth, ...

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Out of the piled-up centuries, comes an inexorable summons for the Twin of Isames!

IT was not a dream. Despite the fact that she had distinctly remembered going to bed as a last conscious effort after the stormy interview with Artemus Russo, Marjorie Westbrook knew, as she had known about other weird instances in her life, that this was stark and cold reality.

There was no state of transition between the pleasant business of retiring and this instinct awareness of an incredible situation. Simply, she had gone to bed in her lovely chamber at home in Forest Hills as Marjorie Westbrook, heiress to the Westbrook Motor millions, her mind filled with business details over the present policies of the late George Westbrook's automobile factories.

And here she was, wide awake and standing before an altar in front of her, an altar of ancient Egyptian motif with the sacred ibis projecting in relief at the ends like figureheads of ships.

She stood in her bare feet upon a cold floor of tessellated marble. Moreover, the satin nightdress, the last item of dress she remembered donning, was gone. She stood there in complete nudity, but she was conscious of no sense of shame or modesty.

Without seeing it, for she was powerless to turn—she was aware of an immensity of space which extended in all directions behind her, a space blocked out with intangible green mist that was almost black and almost of the density of velvet drapes.

At her right hand was an upright sarcophagus with the lid removed. Within the musty and spicily pungent interior was the wrapped figure of a mummy—a mummy which, queerly enough, was headless.

It was all like closing her eyes upon a scene in a cinema for an instant, to open them upon a sudden change of locale. With this significant difference: there was no continuity, no relevance, no congruity, no connection between her life and this grotesque pattern.

None? There were, of course, her previous experiences—those strange, uncanny interludes in her otherwise prosaic life. But there was no tangible connection unless you considered the sarcophagus—which looked exactly like the one she had purchased some months before, even to the headless mummy in the musty interior.

Somehow, and Marjorie could not explain it, that sarcophagus which should have been in her boudoir, was here with her in this other world. That Egyptian sarcophagus—as soon as she had seen it, she had been resolved to possess it. Its fascination for her had been but the apex of an amazing sequence of bizarre occurrences, and it blended as a perfect complement with those experiences...

Marjorie now became aware that just beyond the altar before which she stood was the figure of a man in a cowled crimson robe, his hands busy at a set of dials and buttons before him. And the craziest and most *outré* part of it all was the monk's face. He was Artemus Russo, general manager of Westbrook Motors. Yet there was a strangeness about him that was not Russo.

Before she had time to cry out, to question him, to demand an explanation, Marjorie noticed the light. She was outlined in a glow of light like a psychic aura, of unbelievable intensity, shading from pure white to garish green, mantling her in a bath of living light. As she stared down at her lovely form, to her horror, she saw the flesh become translucent, transparent, and finally invisible—and the skeletal structure of her body from neck to toe became hideously revealed in glowing pink.

Still bound by invisible chains which kept her motionless but without pain, Marjorie heard the cowled figure speak, and the tones of his voice awakened a thousand memories in her mind, memories which were not of the well-tailored Artemus Russo who shouted so irately about proxies and assets and common stock of Westbrook Motors, Inc.

"The hour has come, Princess," he said, "to fulfill your destiny."

"Ankhtares!" she gasped, giving him a name which came easily from her lips. "No! No! I am not ready!"

Her own answer startled her profoundly, shook her to the depths of her soul.

That was what made these bizarre occurrences in her life so distressing. It implied knowledge on her part of monstrous things from the womb of time about which she, as Marjorie Westbrook, should have known nothing. But she did know. Even now, answering so easily to the title of "princess," yet aware of herself as Marjorie Westbrook, she remembered similar experiences.

THE first had happened when she was a child of ten. Without warning she had passed from a safely mundane world to a shadowy temple of vast halls and towering pillars. Going to bed, all tired out from a day of happy play—falling quickly asleep—suddenly she was standing before a high altar whose sides were a frieze of jackal-headed dolls of angular lines. Or were they dolls? How was a little girl of ten to know?

Yet they were not strange to her. Without knowing how she knew, she was as familiar with the symbol of Anubis as she was with her own sister, the twin who had always walked beside her. Sister? With a start, she realized that another little girl was standing with her before that forbidding altar with its plume of curling incense. The little companion was an exact duplicate of herself, dressed in archaic headdress and queerly draped robe of costly silk with beaten gold design in the hem. On her ankles and arms bracelets glittered, one in the form of a coiled serpent with eyes of emerald green.

This was Isames. Without being told, Marjorie knew that her own name was Isira. It had always been Isira—for ten years of Egyptian childhood as a princess of the royal blood. There was no Marjorie Westbrook in this consciousness, and yet she knew she was Marjorie Westbrook and that Sir Gerwain was waiting for her out in her father's kennels. In a way it was terrifying, and Marjorie (Isira) whimpered:

"Be brave, Isira," whispered Isames. "It is our heritage."

Before Marjorie could reply there was movement behind the altar, and Ankhtares, high priest of Ammon, a cold and stern man with the features of Artemus Russo, her father's secretary, swam into view. There was a strange light in his piercing black eyes as he looked out and down upon the two little girls who stood before the altar to the dead, tightly clasping each other's hands.

"Princess Isira and Princess Isames," he spoke in a sonorous voice which echoed hollowly through the great hall of the temple, "in accordance with the rule of your house, blessed under the sign of the *crux ansata* and dedicated to the service of Ra, you are here to choose your destiny. Are you prepared?"

"We are prepared, O Ankhtares," Marjorie heard herself and her sister reply. That the language was not modern English, she did not even note.

The high priest passed his hand above the curling incense rising from the altar in a cabalistic sign, and blue smoke fairly boiled up in writhing convolutions that had sparks of incandescent red. The figure of the high priest was obscured for a moment, and both little girls trembled. Then he came back into view.

"In this, the third era in the second dynasty of Ptolemy," his compelling voice rolled out, "it is written in the Seventh Book of Anubis that of twin princes or princesses of the direct line of Pharaoh only one can ascend to the throne. Herein lies the parting paths of destiny. For one there is the sceptre of a queen, wealth

and glory and power—and death before her youth has faded. For the other there is a timeless void until her spirit shall find life and happiness in a future existence and then she shall grow old before her time. And in the end the twain shall be reunited by a bond far stronger than that of natal ties. It is so written. Choose well, ye little princesses. Behold, the sacred ibis awaits to carry the word to Ammon, Giver of all."

Both little girls clung together and quivered in wide-eyed fright as they saw the blue smoke take the form of the sacred bird. The words of the high priest were incomprehensible to them, but they stared at the shadowy bird of Ra and spoke bravely.

"I want to be a queen," said Isames.

"I want to be happy," said Isira.

With a puff of smoke the nebulous ibis disappeared.

"So be it!" said the voice of Ankhtares.

There was a flash of blinding light, and little Marjorie Westbrook opened her eyes to find the morning sun streaming in at the window and to hear the excited yelping of Sir Gerwain, her wolfhound, outside.

That had happened when she was ten. Now, at twenty-five, in the very midst of undergoing a similar experience, she was able to recall that earlier one.

SHE stared down in a mounting sort of mental fear as she watched her body entirely disappear from beneath her, leaving only the faintly glowing frame of her bony structure. And as she watched, even that began to fade away in the bath of terrible light, the source of which she could not determine. Soon she would be a disembodied head floating above the strange floor.

"The hour is at hand, Princess Isira," said the cowed priest, "for the fulfillment of your destiny. The sands of time have run their interminable course. Beyond human comprehension is the working of the Infinite. You behold, on your right, the sarcophagus of Isames, queen of the Nile, taken unto the arms of Anubis and Thoth in her twenty-sixth year. Alas, only her *chu* (preserved body) remains. Her *ka* (soul bird with human head) has departed for the sun temple of Ammon. Her sacred crypt was violated by vandals and desecrators of the dead, but you can behold her likeness on the lid of the sarcophagus in beaten gold."

Marjorie Westbrook, or the consciousness that was Marjorie Westbrook, stared at the cover of the ornate case and nearly swooned in astonishment. She recalled the face on the lid of her own sarcophagus, the one in her boudoir, and how its haunting familiarity had puzzled and intrigued her. But always it had remained vague and dim. Now, like the sensitized image on a print that has just been withdrawn from developing fluid, the golden features, bathed in that eerie glow, were exact duplicates of her own! It was as though she stared into a burnished mirror of gold. Even the wide, staring eyes seemed alive with the color and expression of her own eyes.

And still this fantastic, this *outré* and bizarre experience was no dream. Marjorie Westbrook was as thoroughly awake as she would ever be. Never, since that soul-shaking and impossible thing which had happened to her at the age of ten, had she experienced, awake or asleep, any further manifestation which included so much as a mention of the lost Isames. In her nocturnal materializations—and

there had been at least one for every year of her life—she had never again seen this strange twin sister or heard of her until now. It came to Marjorie with a dreadful thrill that she was in her own *twenty-sixth year* right now.

NOT once during her entire life had she ever mentioned these weird adventures to anyone, not even to her doctor. It was a closed and sealed book from the world, from even Marjorie herself—except in the throes of the fantastic episodes. But it was not a dream life; she knew that. It was some horrible destiny, an actual and solid fate of terrific force and dim, unguessed purpose that stalked her.

Illustration:

The crystal ball turned inky black

And it did not feed solely upon the hours of night, a mere figment of her imagination. There was that day when she was seventeen, and her father had taken her to the county fair. Normal, happy, light-hearted girl of a modern age, she had clapped her hands in delight when the old Gipsy hag in the gay-colored booth wanted to tell her fortune.

But no sooner had Marjorie seated herself across the table of sand from the woman than the crystal ball thereon turned inky black. The woman started in utter dismay and quickly flung a cloth over the ball. She blanched almost white as she stared with her sharp, black eyes into Marjorie's blue ones.

"Let me see your right hand," she said in a tense whisper.

Obligingly Marjorie stretched out her slim and girlish hand, palm up. Without touching her, the Gipsy stared with bulging eyes, her golden ear-rings advance with violent agitation.

"No," she whispered. "No, no—I cannot read your destiny, child."

"But that isn't fair," pouted Marjorie. "I've paid you a silver dollar. You must read my fortune."

"Here is your money," said the old woman, beginning to shake all over.

"I won't have it back," declared Marjorie defiantly. "Keep it, and read my fortune."

The Gipsy groaned.

"I—I cannot," she articulated with difficulty. "I dare not! I see only that you have a double existence. You will grow old before your time—incredibly old."

"How old?" demanded Marjorie, thinking the Gipsy was putting on a very good act.

"Perhaps—perhaps six thousand years," choked out the other, and then, with a wild cry, the woman fled from the booth.

That experience had taken place in broad daylight; had occurred to Marjorie Westbrook without any transition into another entity, another sphere of life. So she knew she was not crazy. And she knew she did not dream these yearly episodes which wove that strange, irrelevant, and inexplicable pattern through her otherwise normal and sane existence.

"NO! No!" she cried out in horror now against a dread of she knew not what as her skeleton completely disappeared.

But her protests were as naught to this high priest of Ammon who was the counterpart of Artemus Russo. And Marjorie became aware of a pair of hands, cold and clammy as early morning fog off the Sound, which gripped her head. She rolled her eyes to see a green-gray figure that had materialized behind her, a disembodied spirit that was human only in outline—an elemental, even an ectoplasmic projection of Ankhtares.

She opened her mouth to scream in terror, but no sound came. She thought she was in a silent world of chimeras. And the creature carried her bodiless head like a football across the intervening space and set it firmly on the shoulders of the linen-wrapped mummy within the sarcophagus!

"Thy destiny has been fulfilled," came the voice of Ankhtares. "At last we shall both have peace."

There was that blinding flash of light which Marjorie Westbrook had come to know so well, and everything went into the oblivion of nothingness...

MARJORIE opened her eyes. The maid was letting in the sunshine. She was safe at home in her own bed in Forest Hills, the covers drawn snugly up to her chin.

"Miss Westbrook," said the maid softly, "it is eleven o'clock. Mr. Russo is waiting to see you in the sitting room. He insisted that I wake you as he has to attend that board meeting. He said he must have your final word."

Marjorie smiled. Her personal relief was so great that she felt in a most melting mood toward the manager of her affairs.

"Very well," she said. "Tell him I am ready to sign those proxies for him and wind things up. Wait, help me up first." She threw back the silken coverlet, preparatory to sitting up. "Bring over the—"

She broke off in stunned horror. As she moved it sounded like the rattling of parchment and dried bones. As she tossed back the cover, instead of a satin night negligee from Paris upon the lovely body of a twenty-five-year-old beauty, she exposed the gray-brown and dried skin of an Egyptian mummy. Her hands were two shrunken claws, the outline of the bones showing plainly from elbow to fingers.

One terrible shriek Marjorie Westbrook gave ere death overtook her. The horrible episodes of her nocturnal life had finally broken through the barrier that had always surrounded and protected her—had overtaken her at last. The six thousand years were up!

The maid stared, petrified, at the lovely head perfectly joined to that of the six-thousand-year-old mummy of an Egyptian woman. Her eyes rolled wildly to a corner of the room where her mistress' prized sarcophagus stood, and she screamed. The lid was off, and the headless mummy that should have reposed in the case was gone!

"Mr. Russo! Mr. Russo!" she cried as she fled to the outer room. Her voice choked, cut off abruptly as she stared at the couch where she had left the general manager sitting. Lying full-length on the couch was Artemus Russo, his body as

still as death and his face parchment-yellow and amazingly, horribly wrinkled with lines that told of the passage of centuries.

