

# The Golden Lotus

Seneferu, father of the Pharaoh Khufu who built the Great Pyramid of Giza, reigned long over a contented and peaceful Egypt. He had no foreign wars and few troubles at home, and with so little business of state he often found time hanging heavy on his hands.

One day he wandered wearily through his palace at Memphis, seeking for pleasures and finding none that would lighten his heart.

Then he bethought him of his Chief Magician, Zazamankh, and he said, 'If any man is able to entertain me and show me new marvels, surely it is the wise scribe of the rolls. Bring Zazamankh before me.'

Pharaoh: "...devise something that will fill my heart with pleasure"

Straightway his servants went to the House of Wisdom and brought Zazamankh to the presence of Pharaoh. And Seneferu said to him, 'I have sought throughout all my palace for some delight, and found none. Now of your wisdom devise something that will fill my heart with pleasure.' Then said Zazamankh to him, 'O Pharaoh life, health, strength be to you! - my counsel is that you go sailing upon the Nile, and upon the lake below Memphis. This will be no common voyage, if you will follow my advice in all things.'

'Believing that you will show me marvels, I will order out the Royal Boat,' said Seneferu. 'Yet I am weary of sailing upon the Nile and upon the lake.'

'This will be no common voyage,' Zazamankh assured him. 'For your rowers will be different from any you have seen at the oars before. They must be fair maidens from the Royal House of the King's Women: and as you watch them rowing, and see the birds upon the lake, the sweet fields and the green grass upon the banks, your heart will grow glad.'

'Indeed, this will be something new,' agreed Pharaoh, showing some interest at last. 'Therefore I give you charge of this expedition. Speak with my power, and command all that is necessary.'

Then said Zazamankh to the officers and attendants of Pharaoh Seneferu, 'Bring me twenty oars of ebony inlaid with gold, with blades of light wood inlaid with electrum. And choose for rowers the twenty fairest maidens in Pharaoh's household: twenty virgins slim and lovely, fair in their limbs, beautiful, and with flowing hair. And bring me twenty nets of golden thread, and give these nets to the fair maidens to be garments for them. And let them wear ornaments of gold and electrum and malachite.'

All was done according to the words of Zazamankh, and presently Pharaoh was seated in the Royal Boat while the maidens rowed him up and down the stream and upon the shining waters of the lake. And the heart of Seneferu was glad at the sight of the beautiful rowers at their unaccustomed task, and he seemed to be on a voyage in the golden days that were to be when Osiris returns to rule the earth.

But presently a mischance befell that gay and happy party upon the lake. In the raised stern of the Royal Boat two of the maidens were steering with great oars fastened to posts. Suddenly the handle of one of the oars brushed against the head of the girl who was using it and swept the golden lotus she wore on the fillet that held back her hair into the water, where it sank out of sight.

With a little cry she leant over and gazed after it. And as she ceased from her song, so did all the rowers on that side who were taking their time from her.

'Why have you ceased to row?' asked Pharaoh.

And they replied, 'Our little steerer has stopped, and leads us no longer.'

'And why have you ceased to steer and lead the rowers with your song?' asked Seneferu.

'Forgive me, Pharaoh - life, health, strength be to you!' she sobbed. 'But the oar struck my hair and brushed from it the beautiful golden lotus set with malachite which your majesty gave to me, and it has fallen into the water and is lost forever.'

'Row on as before, and I will give you another,' said Seneferu.

But the girl continued to weep, saying, 'I want my golden lotus back, and no other!'

Then said Pharaoh, 'There is only one who can find the golden lotus that has sunk to the bottom of the lake. Bring to me Zazamankh my magician, he who thought of this voyage. Bring him here on to the Royal Boat before me.'

So Zazamankh was brought to where Seneferu sat in his silken pavilion on the Royal Boat. And as he knelt, Pharaoh said to him: 'Zazamankh, my friend and brother, I have done as you advised. My royal heart is refreshed and my eyes are delighted at the sight of these lovely rowers bending to their task. As we pass up and down on the waters of the lake, and they sing to me, while on the shore I see the trees and the flowers and the birds, I seem to be sailing into the golden days either those of old when Re ruled on earth, or those to come when the good god Osiris shall return from the Duat. But now a golden lotus has fallen from the hair of one of these maidens fallen to the bottom of the lake. And she has ceased to sing and the rowers on her side cannot keep time with their oars. And she is not to be comforted with promises of other gifts, but weeps for her golden lotus. Zazamankh, I wish to give back the golden lotus to the little one here, and see the joy return to her eyes.'

'Pharaoh, my lord - life, health, strength be to you!' answered Zazamankh the magician, 'I will do what you ask - for to one with my knowledge it is not a great thing. Yet maybe it is an enchantment you have never seen, and it will fill you with wonder, even as I promised, and make your heart rejoice yet further in new things.'

"...the lake parted as if a piece had been cut out of it with a great sword."

Then Zazamankh stood at the stern of the Royal Boat and began to chant great spells and words of power. And presently he held out his wand over the water, and the lake parted as if a piece had been cut out of it with a great sword. The lake here was twenty feet deep, and the piece of water that the magician moved rose up and set itself upon the surface of the lake so that there was a cliff of water on that side forty feet high.

Now the Royal Boat slid gently down into the great cleft in the lake until it rested on the bottom. On the side towards the forty-foot cliff of water there was a great open space where the bottom of the lake lay uncovered, as firm and dry as the land itself.

And there, just below the stern of the Royal Boat, lay the golden lotus.

With a cry of joy the maiden who had lost it sprang over the side on to the firm ground, picked it up and set it once more in her hair. Then she climbed swiftly back into the Royal Boat and took the steering oar into her hands once more.

Zazamankh slowly lowered his rod, and the Royal Boat slid up the side of the water until it was level with the surface once more. Then at another word of power, and as if drawn by the magician's rod, the great piece of water slid back into place, and the evening breeze rippled the still surface of the lake as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. But the heart of Pharaoh Seneferu rejoiced and was filled with wonder, and he cried: 'Zazamankh, my brother, you are the greatest and wisest of magicians! You have shown me wonders and delights this day, and your reward shall be all that you desire, and a place next to my own in Egypt.' Then

the Royal Boat sailed gently on over the lake in the glow of the evening, while the twenty lovely maidens in their garments of golden net, and the jeweled lotus flowers in their hair dipped their ebony and silver oars in the shimmering waters and sang sweetly a love song of old Egypt:

'She stands upon the further side,  
Between us flows the Nile;  
And in those waters deep and wide  
There lurks a crocodile.

'Yet is my love so true and sweet,  
A word of power, a charm -  
The stream is land beneath my feet  
And bears me without harm.

'For I shall come to where she stands,  
No more be held apart;  
And I shall take my darling's hands  
And draw her to my heart.'