

DAWN:

A NOVEL

BY

H. RIDER HAGGARD,

AUTHOR OF "KING SOLOMON'S MINES," "SHE," "JES," "THE WITCH'S HEAD," ETC.

(Continued.)

"I can not tell you very much about my father, because I do not know much of his life, to a great extent, a sealed book to me. But they say that once he was a very different man, when he was quite young, I mean. But all of a sudden his father—my grandfather, you know—whose picture is on the stairs, died, and within a day or two my mother died too; that was when I was born. After that he broke down, and became what he is now. For twenty years he has lived as he does now, poring all day over books of accounts, and very rarely seeing anybody, for he does all his business by letter, or nearly all of it, and he has no friends. He is not a happy man, Mr. Heigham."

"Apparently not. I can not imagine any one being happy who is superstitious; it is the most dreadful bondage in the world."

"Where are your ravens to-day?" asked Arthur, presently.

"I don't know. I have not seen very much of them for the last week or two. They have made a nest in one of the big trees at the back of the house, and I dare say that they are there, or perhaps they are hunting for their food—they always feed themselves. But I will soon tell you," and she whistled in a soft but penetrating note.

Next minute there was a swoop of wings, and the largest raven, after hovering over her for a minute, lit upon her shoulder, and rubbed his black head against her face.

"This is Jack, you see; I expect that Jill is busy sitting on her eggs. Fly away, Jack, and look after your wife." She clapped her hands, and the great bird, giving a reproachful croak, spread his wings, and was gone.

"You have a strange power over animals to make those birds so fond of you."

"Do you think so? It is only because I have living as I do quite alone, had time to study all their ways, and make friends with them. Do you see that thrush there? I know him well; I feed him during the frost last winter. If you will stand back with the dog, you shall see."

Arthur hid himself behind a thick bush and watched. Angela whistled again, but in another note, with a curious result. Not only the thrush in question, but quite a dozen other birds of different sorts and sizes, came flying round her, some settling at her feet, and one, a little robin, actually perching itself upon her hat.

Presently she dismissed them as she had done the raven by clapping her hands, and came back to Arthur.

"In the winter-time," she said, "I could show you more curious things than that."

"I think that you are a witch," said Arthur, who was astounded at the sight. She laughed as she answered.

"The only witchery that I use is kindness."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"I do so hope that you don't mind dining at half-past twelve, and with my old nurse," Angela said, as they went together up the stairs to the room the used as a dining-room.

"Of course I don't—I like it, really I do." Angela shook her head, and, looking but partially convinced, led the way down the passage, and into the room, where, to her astonishment, she perceived that the dinner-table was furnished with a more sumptuous meal than she had seen upon it for years, the fact being that Pigott had received orders from Philip which she did not know of, not to spare expense while Arthur was his guest.

"What waste," reflected Angela, in whom the pressure of circumstances had developed an economical turn of mind, as she glanced at the unaccustomed jug of beer. "He said he was a teetotaler." A loud "boom" from Pigott, arresting her attention, stopped all further consideration of the matter. That good lady, who, in honor of the occasion, was dressed in a black gown of a formidable character and a many-ribbed cap, was standing up behind her chair waiting to be introduced to the visitor. Angela proceeded to go through the ceremony which Pigott's straight-up-and-down attitude rendered rather trying.

"Nurse, this is the gentleman that my father has asked to stay with us. Mr. Heigham, let me introduce you to my old nurse Pigott."

struck with amazement at the variety and depth of her scholastic acquirements and the extraordinary power of her mind, which, combined with her simplicity and total ignorance of the ways of the world, produced an effect as charming as it was unusual. Needless to say that every hour he knew her he fell more deeply in love with her.

At length, about eight o'clock, just as it was beginning to get dark, she suggested that he should go and sit awhile with her father.

"And what are you going to do?" asked Arthur.

"Oh! I am going to read a little, and then go to bed; I always go to bed about nine," and she held out her hand to say good night. He took it and said:

"Good night, then, I wish it were tomorrow."

"Why?"

"Because then I should be saying, 'Good morning, Angela,' instead of 'Good night, Angela.' May I call you Angela? We seem to know each other so well, you see."

"Yes, of course," she laughed back; "everybody I know calls me Angela, so why shouldn't you?"

"And will you call me Arthur? Everybody I know calls me Arthur."

Angela hesitated, and Angela blushed, though why she hesitated and why she blushed was perhaps more than she could have exactly said.

"Yes, I suppose so—that is, if you like it. It is a pretty name, Arthur. Good night, Arthur," and she was gone.

His companion gone, Arthur turned and entered the house. The study-door was open, so he went straight in. Philip, who was sitting and staring in an abstracted way at the empty fire-place with a light behind him, turned quickly round as he heard his footstep.

"Oh! it's you, is it, Heigham? I suppose Angela has gone upstairs; she goes to rest very early. I hope that she has not bored you, and that old Pigott hasn't talked your head off. I told you that we were an old lot, you know, but, if you find us older than you bargained for, I should advise you to clear out."

"Thank you, I have spent a very happy day."

"Indeed, I am glad to hear it. You must be easily satisfied, have an Arcadian mind, and that sort of thing. Take some whisky, and light your pipe."

Arthur did so, and presently Philip, in that tone of gentlemanly ease which above everything distinguished him from his cousin, led the conversation round to his guest's prospects and affairs, more especially his money affairs. Arthur answered him frankly enough, but this money talk had not the same charms for him that it had for his host. Indeed, a marked repugnance to everything that had to do with money was one of his characteristics; and, wearied out at length with pecuniary details and endless researches into the mysteries of investment, he took advantage of a pause to attempt to change the subject.

"Well," he said, "I am much obliged to you for your advice, for I am very ignorant myself, and hate anything to do with money. I go back to first principles, and believe that we should all be better without it."

Silence ensued which neither of them seemed to care to break. Meantime the wind suddenly sprang up, and began to moan and sigh among the half-clad boughs of the trees outside—making Arthur thoughtful to himself, a very melancholy music. Presently Philip laid his hand upon his guest's arm, and he felt that it shook like an aspen leaf.

"Tell me," he said, in a hoarse whisper, "what do you see there?"

Arthur started, and followed the direction of his eyes to the bare wall opposite the window, at that end of the room through which the door was made.

"I see," he said, "some moving shadows."

"What do they resemble?"

"I don't know; nothing in particular. What are they?"

"What are they?" hissed Philip, whose face was livid with terror, "they are the shades of the dead sent here to torture me. Look, she goes to meet him; the old man is telling her. Now she will wring her hands!"

There was something so excessively uncanny about his host's manner, and his evident conviction of the origin of the wavering figures on the wall (which had now disappeared), that Arthur felt, had it not been for Angela, he would not be sorry to get clear of him and his shadows as soon as possible, for superstitious, he knew, is as contagious as small-pox. When at length he reached his great, bare bed-chamber, not, by the way, a comfortable sort of place to sleep in after such an experience, it was only after some hours, in the excited state of his imagination, that, tired though he was, he could get the rest he needed.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Next morning, when they met at their eight o'clock breakfast, Arthur noticed that Angela was distressed about something.

As she appeared to have no reply ready, the subject then dropped.

After breakfast Angela proposed that they should walk—for the day was again fine—to the top of a hill about a mile away, whence a view of the surrounding country could be obtained. He consented, and on the way told her of his curious experience with her father on the previous night. She listened attentively, and when he had finished, shook her head.

"There is," she said, "something about my father that separates him from everybody else. His life never comes out into the sunlight of the passing day, it always gropes along in the shadow of some gloomy past. What the mystery is that envelopes him I neither know nor care to inquire; but I am sure that there is one."

"How do you explain the shadows?"

"I believe your explanation is right; they are, under certain conditions of light, thrown by a tree that grows some distance off. I have seen something that looks like figures on that wall myself in full daylight. That he should interpret such a simple thing as he does shows a curious state of mind."

"You do not think, then," said Arthur, in order to draw her out, "that it is possible, after all, he was right, and that they were something from another place? The reality of his terror was almost enough to make one believe in them, I can tell you."

"No, I do not," answered Angela, "a minute's thought. 'I have no doubt that the veil between ourselves and the unseen world is thinner than we think. I believe, too, that communications, and even warnings sometimes, under favorable conditions, or when the veil is worn thin by trouble or prayer, can pass from the other world to ourselves. But the very fact of my father's terror proves to me that his shadows are nothing of the sort, for it is hardly possible that spirits can be permitted to come to terrify us poor mortals; if they come at all, it is in love and gentleness, to comfort or to warn, and not to work upon our superstitions."

"You speak as though you knew all about it; you should join the Physical Society," he answered, irreverently, sitting himself down on a fallen tree, an example that she followed.

"I have thought about it sometimes, that is all, and so far as I have read, I think that my belief is a common one, and what the Bible teaches us; but, if you will not think me foolish, I will tell you something that confirms me in it. You know that my mother died when I was born; well, it may seem strange to you, but I am convinced that she is sometimes very near me."

"Do you mean that you see or hear her?"

"No, I only feel her presence; more rarely now, I am sorry to say, as I grow older."

"How do you mean?"

"I can hardly explain what I mean, but sometimes—it may be at night, or when I am sitting alone in the daytime, a great calm comes upon me, and I am a changed woman. All my thoughts rise into a higher, purer air, and are, as it were, tinged with a reflected light; everything earthly seems to pass away from me, and I feel as though fetters had fallen from my soul, and I know that I am near my mother. Then everything passes, and I am myself again."

This conversation—a very curious one, Arthur thought to himself afterward, for two young people on a spring morning—having come to an end, nothing more was said for some while, and they took their way down the hill, varying the route in order to pass through the little hamlet of Bratham. Under a chestnut-tree that stood upon the village green, Arthur noticed, not a village blacksmith, but a small crowd, mostly composed of children, gathered round somebody. On going to see who it was, he discovered a battered-looking old man with an intellectual face, and the remnants of a gentlemanlike appearance, playing on the violin. A very few touches of his bow told Arthur, who knew something of music, that he was in the presence of a performer of no mean merit. Seeing the quality of his two auditors, and that they appreciated his performance, the player changed his music, and from a village jig passed to one of the more difficult opera airs, which he executed in brilliant fashion.

"Bravo!" cried Arthur, as the last notes thrilled and died away. "I see you understand how to play the fiddle."

"Yes sir, and so I should, for I have played first violin at Her Majesty's Opera before now. Name what you like, and I will play it for you. Or, if you like it better you shall hear the water running on the beach. Only say the word."

Arthur thought for a moment.

"It is a beautiful day, let us have a contrast; give us the music of a storm."

The old man considered a while.

"I understand, but you set a difficult subject even for me," and taking up his bow he made several attempts at beginning. "I can't do it," he said, "set something else."

"No, no, try again, that or nothing."

Again he started, and this time his genius took possession of him. The notes fell very softly at first, but with an ominous sound, then rose and wailed like the rising of the wind. Next the music came in gusts, the rain pattered, and the thunder roared, till at length the tempest

seemed to spend its force and pass slowly into the distance.

"There, sir, what do you say to that—have I fulfilled your expectations?"

"Write it down and it will be one of the finest pieces of violin music in the country."

"Write it down. The divine 'afflatus' is not to be caged, sir, it comes and goes. I could never write that music down."

Arthur felt in his pocket without answering, and found five shillings.

"If you will accept this?" he said.

"Thank you, sir, very much. I am gladder of five shillings now than I once was of as many pounds," and he rose to go.

"A man of your talent should not be wandering about like this."

"I must earn a living somehow, for all Talleyrand's witicism to the contrary," was the curious answer.

"Have you no friends?"

"No, sir, this is my only friend; all the rest have deserted me," and he tapped his violin and was gone.

"Lord, sir," said a farmer, who was standing by, "he's gone to get drunk; he is the biggest old drunkard in the countryside, and yet they do say that he was a gentleman once, and the best fiddler in London; but he can't be depended on, so no one will hire him now."

"How sad," said Angela, as they moved homeward.

"Yes, and what music that was; I never heard any with such imagination before. You have a turn that way, Angela, you should try and put it into words, it would make a poem."

"I complain, like the old man, that you set a difficult subject," she said, "but I will try, if you will promise not to laugh at the result."

"If you succeed on paper only half so well as he did on the violin, your verses will be worth listening to, and I certainly shall not laugh."

CHAPTER XXV.

One Saturday morning, when May was three parts gone, Philip announced his intention of going up to London till the Monday on business. He was a man who had long since become callous to appearances, and though Arthur, fearful lest spiteful things should be said of Angela, almost hinted that it would look odd, his host merely laughed, and said that he had little doubt but that his daughter was quite able to look after herself even when such a fascinating young gentleman as himself was concerned. As a matter of fact, his object was to get rid of Angela by marrying her to this young Heigham, who had so opportunely tumbled down from the skies, and whom he rather liked than otherwise. This being the case, he rightly concluded that the more the two were left together, the greater probability there was of his object being attained. Accordingly he left them together as much as possible.

It was on the evening of this Saturday that Arthur gathered up his courage and asked Angela to come and walk through the re-see with him. Angela hesitated a little; the shadow of something about to happen had fallen on her mind; but of extraordinary beauty of the evening, to say nothing of the prospect of his company, turned the scale in Arthur's favor.

It was one of those nights of which, if we are lucky, we get some five or six in the course of an English summer. The moon was at her full, and the twilight ended, she filled the heavens with her light. Every twig and blade of grass shined out as clearly as in the day, but looked like frosted silver. The silence was intense, and so still was the air that the sharp shadows of the trees were motionless upon the grass, only growing with the growing hours. It was one of those nights that fill us with an indescribable emotion, bringing us into closer companionship with the unseen than ever does the garish, busy day. In such an hour we can sometimes feel, or think that we can feel, other presences around us, and involuntarily we listen for the whisper of the wings and the half-forgotten voices of our beloved.

On this particular evening some such feeling was stirring in Angela's heart as with slow steps she led the way into the little village churchyard, a similar spot to that which is to be found in many a country parish, except that the population being very small, there were but few recent graves. Most of the mounds had no head-stones to recall the names of the neglected dead, but here and there were dotted discolored slabs, some sunk a foot or two into the soil, a few lying prone upon it, and the remainder thrown by the gradual subsidence of their supports into every variety of angle, as though they had been suddenly halted in the maddest whirl of a grotesque dance of death.

Picking her way through these, Angela stopped under an ancient yew, and, pointing to one of two shadowed mounds to which the moonlight scarcely struggled, said in a low voice:

"That is my mother's grave."

It was a modest tenement enough, a little heap of close green turf, surrounded by a railing, and planted with sweet-williams and forget-me-nots. At its head was placed a white marble cross, on which Arthur could just distinguish the words "Hilda Carefoot," and the date of death.

He was about to speak, but she stopped him with a gentle movement, and then, stepping forward to the head of the railing, she buried her face in her hands, and remained motionless. Arthur watched her with curiosity. What, he won-

dered, was passing in the mind of this strange and beautiful woman, who had grown up so sweet and pure amid moral desolation, like a white lily blooming alone on the black African plains in winter? Suddenly she raised her head, and saw the inquiring look he bent upon her. She came toward him, and, in that sweet, half-pleading voice which was one of her greatest charms, she said:

"I fear you think me very foolish?"

"Why should I think you foolish?"

"Because I have come here at night to stand before a half-forgotten grave."

"I do not think you foolish, indeed. I was only wondering what was passing in your mind."

Angela hung her head and made no answer, and the clock above them boomed out the hour, raising its sullen note in insolent defiance of the silence. What is it that is so solemn about the striking of the bell-clock when one stands in a churchyard at night? Is it that the hour softens our natures, and makes them more amenable to semi-superstitious influences? Or is it that the thousand evidences of departed mortality which surrounded us, appealing with dumb force to natural fears, throw open for a space the gates of our world-sealed imagination, to tenant its vast halls with prophetic echoes of our end? Perhaps it is useless to enquire. The result remains the same; few of us hear those tones at night without a qualm, and did we put our thoughts into words, they would run something thus:

"That sound once borne upon the living ears of those who sleep around us. We hear it now. In a little while, hour after hour, it will echo against the tombstones of our graves, and new generations, coming out of the silent future, will stand where we stand, and harked; and music, as we mused, over the old problems that we have gone to solve; while we—shall we not be deaf to hear and dumb to utter?"

Such, at any rate, were the unspoken thoughts that crept into the hearts of Arthur and Angela as the full sound from the belfry thinned itself away into silence. She grew a little pale, and glanced at him, and he gave an involuntary shiver, while even the dog Aleck sniffed and whined uncomfortably.

"It feels cold," he said; "shall we go?"

They turned and walked toward the gate, and, by the time they reached it, all superstitious thoughts had vanished—at any rate, from Arthur's mind, for he recollected that he had set himself a task to do, and that now would be the time to do it. Absorbed in this reflection, he forgot his politeness, and passed first through the turnstile. On the further side he paused, and looked earnestly into his beloved's face. Their eyes met, and there was that in his that caused her to swiftly droop her own. A silence ensued as they stood by the gate. He broke it.

"It is a lovely night; let us walk through the ruins."

"I shall wet my feet; the dew must be falling."

"There is no dew falling to-night. Won't you come?"

"Let us go to-morrow; it is later than I generally go in. Pigott will wonder what has become of me."

"Never mind Pigott; the night is too fine to waste asleep; besides, you, one should always look at ruins by moonlight. Please come."

She looked at him doubtfully, hesitated, and came.

"What do you want to see?" she said, presently, with as near an approach to irritation as he had ever heard her indulge in. "That is the famous window that Mr. Fraser always goes into raptures about."

"It is beautiful; shall we sit down here and look at it?"

They sat down on a low mass of fallen masonry some fifteen paces from the window. Around them lay a delicate tracery of shadows, while they themselves were seated in the eye of the moonlight, and remained for a while as silent as still as though they had been the shades of the painted figures that had once filled the stony frame above them.

"Angela," he said at length—"Angela, listen, and I will tell you something. My mother, a woman to whom sorrow had become almost an inspiration, when she was dying, spoke to me something thus: 'There is,' she said, 'but one thing that I know of that has the power to make life happy as God meant it to be, and as the folly and weakness of men and women render it nearly impossible for it to be, and that is—love. Love has been the consolation of my own existence in the midst of many troubles; first, the great devotion I bore your father, and then that which I entertain for yourself; without these two ties, life would indeed have been a desert. And yet though it is a grief to me to leave you, and though I shrink from the dark passage that lies before me, so far does that first great love outweigh the love I bear you, that in my calmer moments I am glad to go, because I know I am wished by your father. And from this I wish you to learn a lesson; look for your happiness in life from the love of your life, for there only will you find it. Do not fritter away your heart, but seek out some woman, some one good and pure and true, and, in giving her your devotion, you will reap a full reward, for her happiness will reflect your own, and, if your choice is right, you will, however stormy your life may be, lay up for yourself, as I feel that I have done, an everlasting joy.'"

[To be continued.]

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