

**Stella Fregelius**

**By**

**H. Rider Haggard**

"Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas,  
Atque metus omnes, et inexorabile fatum  
Subjecit pedibus; strepitumque Acherontis avari."

## DEDICATION

My Dear John Berwick,

When you read her history in MS. you thought well of "Stella Fregelius" and urged her introduction to the world. Therefore I ask you, my severe and accomplished critic, to accept the burden of a book for which you are to some extent responsible. Whatever its fate, at least it has pleased you and therefore has not been written quite in vain.

H. Rider Haggard.

Ditchingham,

25th August, 1903.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

The author feels that he owes some apology to his readers for his boldness in offering to them a modest story which is in no sense a romance of the character that perhaps they expect from him; which has, moreover, few exciting incidents and no climax of the accustomed order, since the end of it only indicates its real beginning.

His excuse must be that, in the first instance, he wrote it purely to please himself and now publishes it in the hope that it may please some others. The problem of such a conflict, common enough mayhap did we but know it, between a departed and a present personality, of which the battle-ground is a bereaved human heart and the prize its complete possession; between earthly duty and spiritual desire also; was one that had long attracted him. Finding at length a few months of leisure, he treated the difficult theme, not indeed as he would have wished to do, but as best he could.

He may explain further that when he drafted this book, now some five years ago, instruments of the nature of the "aerophone" were not so much talked of as they are to-day. In fact this aerophone has little to do with his characters or their history, and the main motive of its introduction to his pages was to suggest how powerless are all such material means to bring within mortal reach the transcendental and unearthly ends which, with their aid, were attempted by Morris Monk.

These, as that dreamer learned, must be far otherwise obtained, whether in truth and spirit, or perchance, in visions only.

1903.

STELLA FREGELIUS

CHAPTER I

MORRIS, MARY, AND THE AEROPHONE

Above, the sky seemed one vast arc of solemn blue, set here and there with points of tremulous fire; below, to the shadowy horizon, stretched the plain of the soft grey sea, while from the fragrances of night and earth floated a breath of sleep and flowers.

A man leaned on the low wall that bordered the cliff edge, and looked at sea beneath and sky above. Then he contemplated the horizon, and murmured some line heard or learnt in childhood, ending "where earth and heaven meet."

"But they only seem to meet," he reflected to himself, idly. "If I sailed to that spot they would be as wide apart as ever. Yes, the stars would be as silent and as far away, and the sea quite as restless and as salt. Yet there must be a place where they do meet. No, Morris, my friend, there is no such place in this world, material or moral; so stick to facts, and leave fancies alone."

But that night this speculative man felt in the mood for fancies, for

presently he was staring at one of the constellations, and saying to himself, "Why not? Well, why not? Granted force can travel through ether,--whatever ether is--why should it stop travelling? Give it time enough, a few seconds, or a few minutes or a few years, and why should it not reach that star? Very likely it does, only there it wastes itself. What would be needed to make it serviceable? Simply this--that on the star there should dwell an Intelligence armed with one of my instruments, when I have perfected them, or the secret of them. Then who knows what might happen?" and he laughed a little to himself at the vagary.

From all of which wandering speculations it may be gathered that Morris Monk was that rather common yet problematical person, an inventor who dreamed dreams.

An inventor, in truth, he was, although as yet he had never really invented anything. Brought up as an electrical engineer, after a very brief experience of his profession he had fallen victim to an idea and become a physicist. This was his idea, or the main point of it--for its details do not in the least concern our history: that by means of a certain machine which he had conceived, but not as yet perfected, it would be possible to complete all existing systems of aerial communication, and enormously to simplify their action and enlarge their scope. His instruments, which were wireless telephones--aerophones he called them--were to be made in pairs, twins that should talk only to each other. They required no high poles, or balloons, or any other

cumbrous and expensive appliance; indeed, their size was no larger than that of a rather thick despatch box. And he had triumphed; the thing was done--in all but one or two details.

For two long years he had struggled with these, and still they eluded him. Once he had succeeded--that was the dreadful thing. Once for a while the instruments had worked, and with a space of several miles between them. But--this was the maddening part of it--he had never been able to repeat the exact conditions; or, rather, to discover precisely what they were. On that occasion he had entrusted one of his machines to his first cousin, Mary Porson, a big girl with her hair still down her back, rather idle in disposition, but very intelligent, when she chose. Mary, for the most part, had been brought up at her father's house, close by. Often, too, she stayed with her uncle for weeks at a stretch, so at that time Morris was as intimate with her as a man of eight and twenty usually is with a relative in her teens.

The arrangement on this particular occasion was that she should take the machine--or aerophone, as its inventor had named it--to her home. The next morning, at the appointed hour, as Morris had often done before, he tried to effect communication, but without result. On the following day, at the same hour, he tried again, when, to his astonishment, instantly the answer came back. Yes, as distinctly as though she were standing by his side, he heard his cousin Mary's voice.

"Are you there?" he said, quite hopelessly, merely as a matter of



form--of very common form--and well-nigh fell to the ground when he received the reply:

"Yes, yes, but I have just been telegraphed for to go to Beaulieu; my mother is very ill."

"What is the matter with her?" he asked; and she replied:

"Inflammation of the lungs--but I must stop; I can't speak any more."  
Then came some sobs and silence.

That same afternoon, by Mary's direction, the aerophone was brought back to him in a dog-cart, and three days later he heard that her mother, Mrs. Porson, was dead.

Some months passed, and when they met again, on her return from the Riviera, Morris found his cousin changed. She had parted from him a child, and now, beneath the shadow of the wings of grief, suddenly she had become a woman. Moreover, the best and frankest part of their intimacy seemed to have vanished. There was a veil between them. Mary thought of little, and at this time seemed to care for no one except her mother, who was dead. And Morris, who had loved the child, recoiled somewhat from the new-born woman. It may be explained that he was afraid of women. Still, with an eye to business, he spoke to her about the aerophone; and, so far as her memory served her, she confirmed all the details of their short conversation across the gulf of empty space.

"You see," he said, trembling with excitement, "I have got it at last."

"It looks like it," she answered, wearily, her thoughts already far away. "Why shouldn't you? There are so many odd things of the sort. But one can never be sure; it mightn't work next time."

"Will you try again?" he asked.

"If you like," she answered; "but I don't believe I shall hear anything now. Somehow--since that last business--everything seems different to me."

"Don't be foolish," he said; "you have nothing to do with the hearing; it is my new receiver."

"I daresay," she replied; "but, then, why couldn't you make it work with other people?"

Morris answered nothing. He, too, wondered why.

Next morning they made the experiment. It failed. Other experiments followed at intervals, most of which were fiascos, although some were partially successful. Thus, at times Mary could hear what he said. But except for a word or two, and now and then a sentence, he could not hear her whom, when she was still a child and his playmate, once he had heard

so clearly.

"Why is it?" he said, a year or two later, dashing his fist upon the table in impotent rage. "It has been; why can't it be?"

Mary turned her large blue eyes up to the ceiling, and reflectively rubbed her dimpled chin with a very pretty finger.

"Isn't that the kind of question they used to ask oracles?" she asked lazily--"Oh! no, it was the oracles themselves that were so vague. Well, I suppose because 'was' is as different from 'is' as 'as' is from 'shall be.' We are changed, Cousin; that's all."

He pointed to his patent receiver, and grew angry.

"Oh, it isn't the receiver," she said, smoothing her curling hair; "it's us. You don't understand me a bit--not now--and that's why you can't hear me. Take my advice, Morris"--and she looked at him sharply--"when you find a woman whom you can hear on your patent receiver, you had better marry her. It will be a good excuse for keeping her at a distance afterwards."

Then he lost his temper; indeed, he raved, and stormed, and nearly smashed the patent receiver in his fury. To a scientific man, let it be admitted, it was nothing short of maddening to be told that the successful working of his instrument, to the manufacture of which he

had given eight years of toil and study, depended upon some pre-existent sympathy between the operators of its divided halves. If that were so, what was the use of his wonderful discovery, for who could ensure a sympathetic correspondent? And yet the fact remained that when, in their playmate days, he understood his cousin Mary, and when her quiet, indolent nature had been deeply moved by the shock of the news of her mother's peril, the aerophone had worked. Whereas now, when she had become a grown-up young lady, he did not understand her any longer--he, whose heart was wrapped up in his experiments, and who by nature feared the adult members of her sex, and shrank from them; when, too, her placid calm was no longer stirred, work it would not.

She laughed at his temper; then grew serious, and said:

"Don't get angry, Morris. After all, there are lots of things that you and I can't understand, and it isn't odd that you should have tumbled across one of them. If you think of it, nobody understands anything. They know that certain things happen, and how to make them happen; but they don't know why they happen, or why, as in your case, when they ought to happen, they won't."

"It is all very well for you to be philosophical," he answered, turning upon her; "but can't you see, Mary, that the thing there is my life's work? It is what I have given all my strength and all my brain to make, and if it fails in the end--why, then I fail too, once and forever. And I have made it talk. It talked perfectly between this place and Seaview,

and now you stand there and tell me that it won't work any more because I don't understand you. Then what am I to do?"

"Try to understand me, if you think it worth while, which I don't; or go on experimenting," she answered. "Try to find some substance which is less exquisitely sensitive, something a little grosser, more in key with the material world; or to discover someone whom you do understand. Don't lose heart; don't be beaten after all these years."

"No," he answered, "I don't unless I die," and he turned to go.

"Morris," she said, in a softer voice, "I am lazy, I know. Perhaps that is why I adore people who can work. So, although you don't think anything of me, I will do my honest best to get into sympathy with you again; yes, and to help in any way I can. No; it's not a joke. I would give a great deal to see the thing a success."

"Why do you say I don't think anything of you, Mary? Of course, it isn't true. Besides, you are my cousin, and we have always been good friends since you were a little thing."

She laughed. "Yes, and I suppose that as you had no brothers or sisters they taught you to pray for your cousin, didn't they? Oh, I know all about it. It is my unfortunate sex that is to blame; while I was a mere tom-boy it was different. No one can serve two masters, can they? You have chosen to serve a machine that won't go, and I daresay that you are

wise. Yes, I think that it is the better part--until you find someone  
that will make it go--and then you would adore her--by aerophone!"