

Dawn

By

H. Rider Haggard

"Our natures languish incomplete;
Something obtuse in this our star
Shackles the spirit's winged feet;
But a glory moves us from afar,
And we know that we are strong and fleet."

"Once more I behold the face of her
Whose actions all had the character
Of an inexpressible charm, expressed;
Whose movements flowed from a centre of rest,
And whose rest was that of a swallow, rife
With the instinct of reposing life;
Whose mirth had a sadness all the while
It sparkled and laughed, and whose sadness lay
In the heaven of such a crystal smile
That you longed to travel the self-same way
To the brightness of sorrow. For round her breathed
A grace like that of the general air,
Which softens the sharp extremes of things,
And connects by its subtle, invisible stair
The lowest and the highest. She interwreathed
Her mortal obscureness with so much light
Of the world unrisen, that angel's wings
Could hardly have given her greater right
To float in the winds of the Infinity.

Edmund Ollier.

DAWN

CHAPTER I

"You lie; you always were a liar, and you always will be a liar. You told my father how I spent the money."

"Well, and what if I did? I had to look after myself, I suppose. You forget that I am only here on sufferance, whilst you are the son of the house. It does not matter to you, but he would have turned me out of doors," whined George.

"Oh! curse your fine words; it's you who forget, you swab. Ay, it's you who forget that you asked me to take the money to the gambling-tent, and made me promise that you should have half of what we won, but that I should play for both. What, are you beginning to remember now--is it coming back to you after a whole month? I am going to quicken your memory up presently, I can tell you; I have got a good deal to pay off, I'm thinking. I know what you are at; you want to play cuckoo, to turn 'Cousin Philip' out that 'Cousin George' may fill the nest. You know the old man's soft points, and you keep working him up against me. You think that you would like the old place when he's gone--ay, and I daresay that you will get it before you have done, but I mean to have my penn'orth out of you now, at any rate," and, brushing the tears of anger that stood in his brown eyes away with the

back of his hand, the speaker proceeded to square up to George in a most determined way.

Now Philip, with his broad shoulders and his firm-knit frame, would, even at eighteen, have been no mean antagonist for a full-grown man; much more than did he look formidable to the lankly, overgrown stripling crouching against the corner of the wall that prevented his further retreat.

"Philip, you're not going to strike me, are you, when you know you are so much stronger?"

"Yes, I am, though; if I can't match you with my tongue, at any rate I will use my fists. Look out."

"Oh, Philip, don't! I'll tell your father."

"Tell him! why, of course you will, I know that; but you shall have something to lie about this time," and he advanced to the attack with a grim determination not pleasant for his cousin to behold.

Finding that there was no escape, George turned upon him with so shrill a curse that it even frightened from his leafy perch in the oak above the tame turtle-dove, intensely preoccupied as he was in cooing to a new-found mate. He did more than curse; he fought like a cornered rat, and with as much chance as the rat with a trained fox-terrier. In

a few seconds his head was as snugly tucked away in the chancery of his cousin's arm as ever any property was in the court of that name, and, to speak truth, it seemed quite possible that, when it emerged from its retreat, it would, like the property, be much dilapidated and extensively bled.

Let us not dwell upon the scene; for George it was a very painful one, so painful that he never quite forgot it. His nose, too, was never so straight again. It was soon over, though to one of the parties time went with unnatural slowness.

"Well, I think you've had about enough for once," soliloquized Philip, as he critically surveyed the writhing mass on the ground before him; and he looked a very handsome lad as he said it.

His curly black hair hung in waving confusion over his forehead, and flung changing lights and shadows into the depths of his brown eyes, whilst his massive and somewhat heavy features were touched into a more active life by the light of that pleasing excitement which animates nine men out of every ten of the Anglo-Saxon race when they are engaged on killing or hurting some other living creature. The face, too, had a certain dignity about it, a little of the dignity of justice; it was the face of one who feels that if his action has been precipitate and severe, it has at any rate been virtuous. The full but clear-cut lips also had their own expression on them, half serious, half comical; humour, contempt, and even pity were blended in it.

Altogether Philip Caresfoot's appearance in the moment of boyish vengeance was pleasing and not uninteresting.

Presently, however, something of the same change passed over his face that we see in the sky when a cloud passes over the sun; the light faded out of it. It was astonishing to note how dull and heavy--ay, more, how bad it made him look all in a breath.

"There will be a pretty business about this," he murmured, and then, administering a sharp kick to the prostrate and groaning form on the ground before him, he said, "Now, then, get up; I'm not going to touch you again. Perhaps, though, you won't be in quite such a hurry to tell lies about me another time, though I suppose that one must always expect a certain amount of lying from a half-bred beggar like you. Like mother, like son, you know."

This last sentence was accompanied by a bitter laugh, and produced a decided effect on the grovelling George, who slowly raised himself upon his hands, and, lifting his head, looked his cousin full in the face.

It was not the ghastly appearance of his mangled and blood-soaked countenance that made Philip recoil so sharply from the sight of his own handiwork--he had fought too often at school to be chicken-hearted about a little bloodshed; and, besides, he knew that his cousin was only knocked about, not really injured--but rather the intense and

almost devilish malignity of the expression that hovered on the blurred features and in the half-closed eyes. But no attempt was made by George to translate the look into words, and indeed Philip felt that it was untranslatable. He also felt dimly that the hate and malice with which he was regarded by the individual at his feet was of a more concentrated and enduring character than most men have the power to originate. In the lurid light of that one glance he was able, though he was not very clever, to pierce the darkest recesses of his cousin's heart, and to see his inmost thought, no longer through a veil, but face to face. And what he saw was sufficient to make the blood leave his ruddy cheek, and to fix his eyes into an expression of fear.

Next second George dropped his head on to the ground again, and began to moan in an ostentatious manner, possibly in order to attract some one whose footsteps could be plainly heard proceeding slowly down a shrubbery-path on the other side of the yard wall. At any rate, that was the effect produced; for next moment, before Philip could think of escape, had he wished to escape, a door in the wall was opened, and a gentleman, pausing on the threshold, surveyed the whole scene, with the assistance of a gold-mounted eye-glass, with some evident surprise and little apparent satisfaction.

The old gentleman, for he was old, made so pretty a picture, framed as he was in the arched doorway, and set off by a natural background of varying shades of green, that his general appearance is worth

sketching as he stood. To begin with, he was dressed in the fashion of the commencement of this century, and, as has been said, old, though it was difficult to say how old. Indeed, so vigorous and comparatively youthful was his bearing that he was generally taken to be considerably under seventy, but, as a matter of fact, he was but a few years short of eighty. He was extremely tall, over six feet, and stood upright as a lifeguardsman; indeed, his height and stately carriage would alone have made him a remarkable-looking man, had there been nothing else unusual about him; but, as it happened, his features were as uncommon as his person. They were clear-cut and cast in a noble mould. The nose was large and aquiline, the chin, like his son Philip's, square and determined; but it was his eyes that gave a painful fascination to his countenance. They were steely blue, and glittered under the pent-house of his thick eyebrows, that, in striking contrast to the snow-white of his hair, were black in hue, as tempered steel glitters in a curtained room. It was those eyes, in conjunction with sundry little peculiarities of temper, that had earned for the old man the title of "Devil Caresfoot," a sobriquet in which he took peculiar pride. So pleased was he with it, indeed, that he caused it to be engraved in solid oak letters an inch long upon the form of a life-sized and life-like portrait of himself that hung over the staircase in the house.

"I am determined," he would say to his son, "to be known to my posterity as I was known to my contemporaries. The picture represents my person not inaccurately; from the nickname my descendants will be

able to gather what the knaves and fools with whom I lived thought of my character. Ah! boy, I am wearing out; people will soon be staring at that portrait and wondering if it was like me. In a very few years I shall no longer be 'devil,' but 'devilled,'" and he would chuckle at his grim and ill-omened joke.

Philip felt his father's eyes playing upon him, and shrunk from them. His face had, at the mere thought of the consequences of his chastisement of his cousin, lost the beauty and animation that had clothed it a minute before; now it grew leaden and hard, the good died away from it altogether, and, instead of a young god bright with vengeance, there was nothing but a sullen youth with dull and frightened eyes. To his son, as to most people who came under his influence, "Devil" Caresfoot was a grave reality.

Presently the picture in the doorway opened its mouth and spoke in a singularly measured, gentle voice.

"You will forgive me, Philip, for interrupting your _tete-a-tete_, but may I ask what is the meaning of this?"

Philip returned no answer.

"Since your cousin is not in a communicative mood, George, perhaps you will inform me why you are lying on your face and groaning in that unpleasant and aggressive manner?"

George lifted his blood-stained face from the stones, and, looking at his uncle, groaned louder than ever.

"May I ask you, Philip, if George has fallen down and hurt himself, or if there has been an--an--altercation between you?"

Here George himself got up and, before Philip could make any reply, addressed himself to his uncle.

"Sir," he said, "I will answer for Philip; there has been an altercation, and he in the scuffle knocked me down, and I confess," here he put his hand up to his battered face, "that I am suffering a good deal, but what I want to say is, that I beg you will not blame Philip. He thought that I had wronged him, and, though I am quite innocent, and could easily have cleared myself had he given me a chance, I must admit that appearances are to a certain extent against me----"

"He lies!" broke in Philip, sullenly.

"You will wonder, sir," went on the blood-stained George, "how I allowed myself to be drawn into such a brutal affair, and one so discreditable to your house. I can only say that I am very sorry,"-- which indeed he was--"and that I should never have taken any notice of his words--knowing that he would regret them on reflection--had he not

in an unguarded moment allowed himself to taunt me with my birth. Uncle, you know the misfortune of my father's marriage, and that she was not his equal in birth, but you know too that she was my mother and I love her memory though I never saw her, and I could not bear to hear her spoken of like that, and I struck him. I hope that both you and he will forgive me; I cannot say any more."

"He lies again, he cannot speak the truth."

"Philip, will you allow me to point out," remarked his father in his blindest voice, "that the continued repetition of the very ugly word 'lie' is neither narrative nor argument. Perhaps you will be so kind as to tell me your side of the story; you know I always wish to be perfectly impartial."

"He lied to you this morning about the money. It's true enough that I gambled away the ten pounds at Roxham fair, instead of paying it into the bank as you told me, but he persuaded me to it, and he was to have shared the profits if we won. I was a blackguard, but he was a bigger blackguard; why should I have all the blame and have that fellow continually shoved down my throat as a saint? And so I thrashed him, and that is all about it."

"Sir, I am sorry to contradict Philip, but indeed he is in error; the recollection of what took place has escaped him. I could, if necessary, bring forward evidence--Mr. Bellamy----"

"There is no need, George, for you to continue," and then, fixing his glittering eye on Philip: "it is very melancholy for me, having only one son, to know him to be such a brute, such a bearer of false witness, such an impostor as you are. Do you know that I have just seen Mr. Bellamy, the head clerk at the bank, and inquired if he knew anything of what happened about that ten pounds, and do you know what he told me?"

"No, I don't, and I don't want to."

"But I really must beg your attention: he told me that the day following the fair your cousin George came to the bank with ten pounds, and told him how you had spent the ten pounds I gave you to pay in, and that he brought the money, his own savings, to replace what you had gambled away; and Bellamy added that, under all the circumstances, he did not feel justified in placing it to my credit. What have you to say to that?"

"What have I to say? I have to say that I don't believe a word of it. If George had meant to do me a good turn he would have paid the money in and said nothing to Bellamy about it. Why won't you trust me a little more, father? I tell you that you are turning me into a scoundrel. I am being twisted up into a net of lies till I am obliged to lie myself to keep clear of ruin. I know what this sneak is at; he wants to work you into cutting me out of the property which should be

mine by right. He knows your weaknesses----"

"My weaknesses, sir--my weaknesses!" thundered his father, striking his gold-headed cane on to the stones; "what do you mean by that?"

"Hush, uncle, he meant nothing," broke in George.

"Meant nothing! Then for an idle speech it is one that may cost him dear. Look you here, Philip Caresfoot, I know very well that our family has been quite as remarkable for its vices as its virtues, but for the last two hundred and fifty years we have been gentlemen, and you are not a gentleman; we have not been thieves, and you have proved yourself a thief; we have spoken the truth, and you are, what you are so fond of calling your cousin, who is worth two of you, a liar. Now listen. However imperious I may have grown in my old age, I can still respect the man who thwarts me even though I hate him; but I despise the man who deceives me, as I despise you, my dear son Philip--and I tell you this, and I beg you to lay it to heart, that if ever again I find that you have deceived me, by Heaven I will disinherit you in favour of--_oh, oh!_" and the old man fell back against the grey wall, pressing his hands to his breast and with the cold perspiration starting on to his pallid countenance.

Both the lads sprang forward, but before they reached him he had recovered himself.

"It is nothing," he said, in his ordinary gentle voice, "a trifling indisposition. I wish you both good morning, and beg you to bear my words in mind."

When he was fairly gone, George came up to his cousin and laid his hand upon his arm.

"Why do you insist upon quarrelling with me, Philip? it always ends like this, you always get the worst of it."

But Philip's only reply was to shake him roughly off, and to vanish through the door towards the lake. George regarded his departing form with a peculiar smile, which was rendered even more peculiar by the distortion of his swollen features.