

***JOAN  
CONQUEST***



***THE HAWK  
OF EGYPT***

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# **The Hawk of Egypt**

EAN 8596547237136

DigiCat, 2022

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THE END

## CHAPTER I

*"For in the days we know not of  
Did fate begin  
Weaving the web of days that wove  
Your doom."*

### SWINBURNE.

". . . allahu akbar—la ilaha—illa 'llah!"

Across the golden glory of the sky floated the insistent call of the *muezzin* just as Damaris, followed closely by Wellington, her bulldog, turned out of the narrow street into the Khan el-Khalili. Shrill and sweet, from far and near it came, calling the faithful to prayer, impelling merchants to leave their wares, buyers their purchases, gossips their chatter, and to turn in the direction of Mecca and offer their praise to Allah, who is God.

As the entire male population of the native quarter knelt, the girl drew back beneath an awning of many colours which shaded silken goods from the rays of the sun, whilst curious eyes peeped down upon her from behind the shelter of the *masharabeyeh*, the harem lattice of finely-carved wood. Yards of silk of every hue lay tumbled inside and outside the *dukkan* or shop in the silk-market; silken scarves, plain and embroidered, hung from strings; silk shawls were spread upon Persian carpets; a veritable riot of colour against the yellow-white plaster of the shop walls,

above which flamed the sky, a cloak of blue, embroidered in rose and gold and amethyst.

The native women behind the shelter of the wood lattice or the *yashmak* or the all-enveloping *barku*, talked softly together as they watched the beautiful girl who serenely and quite unveiled walked amongst men with an animal of surpassing hideousness at her heels.

She stood with her head uncovered—it is permissible at sunset—and with her face lifted, as she listened to the call to prayer, so that a sun-ray silting in through the silks blazed down upon the positively red curls which rioted all over her head and were of a tone sharper than henna, yet many times removed from the shades of red known as carrots or ginger.

Her skin was *matte*, her mouth crimson, and curved, the teeth perfect, and her heavily-lashed eyes of so deep a purple as to appear black. She was slim and supple, unencumbered by anything more confining than a suspender-belt, a fortnight off her eighteenth birthday and entirely lovable in looks, ways and temperament in the eyes of all mankind, which includes women.

The prayer over, and the men again about the business of the hour, she enquired her way of the vendor of silks who, having quickly replaced his shoes, had as hastily returned to his shop, his heart rejoicing at the prospect of perhaps one or two hours' more bargaining—for where is to be found the Oriental who knows the value of time?

Loving animals, Damaris wanted to find that corner near the silk-market where can be purchased anything from a camel to a hunting cheetah, a greyhound to a falcon.

It is not wise for European women to saunter about the old Arabian quarter unaccompanied, especially if they have been blessed by the gods in the ways of looks. Damaris Hethencourt most certainly ought not to have been there, but you must perforce follow the path Fate has marked out for you, whether it leads through country lanes, or Piccadilly, or the Arab quarter of Cairo.

The vendor of silks salaamed deeply before her beauty and the graciousness of her manner, for she smiled when she talked and spoke the prettiest broken Arabic in the world.

So, putting the huge two-year-old bulldog, which one day was to claim the proud title of champion, on the leash, she wended her way through the narrow streets in which two camels may scarce squeeze past each other and where the *masharabeyeh* of the harems almost meet overhead.

Water-carriers, camels, sweetmeat-sellers; lowly women in black gown and *yashmak*; coffee-sellers; donkeys which continually bray and dogs which unceasingly bark; cracking of whips; shrill cries of "*Dahrik ya sitt or musyu*," ("Thy back, lady, or sir"); shouts of *U'a u'a*; clashing of bronze ware; snarls of anger; laughter; song; dust and colour, all the ingredients which go to the entrancement of the bazaar.

And the odours?

Scent and perfume, aroma and odour; cedars of Lebanon and *harem* musk; tang of the sandy sea, fume of the street; the trail of smoke and onions; the milk of goats; the reek of humanity; the breath of kine. Make a bundle of that, and tie it with the silken lashes of women's eyes; secure it with the steel of a needle-pointed knife—and leave it at that.

There is *no* describing the smell of the East.

The sale of really good animals—the other kind you can buy by lifting a finger in the streets—takes place twice a month in a small square near the Suk-en Nahlesin; but as the way to it leads through many dirty and twisting lanes, few Europeans ever get so far.

The stock is tethered to iron rings in the ground, the vendors squat near by, but at a safe distance from teeth, claws or hoofs; the purchasers stand still farther off; there sometimes occurs a free fight, when the length of the chain that tethers the jaguar next the hunting cheetah is too long by a foot or so; and the noise is always deafening.

Abdul, falconer of Shammar—which district is to be found on the holy road to Mecca—being of that locality specialises in the *shahin*, which is a species of hawk; visits the market by appointment only, and, being independent and a specialist, does not always keep that appointment.

Damaris turned suddenly into the market and hurriedly looked round for shelter, which she found in an arched doorway leading to the usual court of the native house.

Zulannah the courtesan peered down upon her from between the silken curtains of her balcony, and clapped her hands twice so that her woman-slaves ran quickly to watch and whisper about this white woman who stood unattended in the open market. They giggled in the insufferable Eastern way, and pointed across the Square, where the whole of the male population surged about two men. But Zulannah, the recognised beauty of the North of Egypt, shrugged her dimpled shoulders as she stuffed over-large portions of



sweetmeats between her dazzling teeth and stretched herself upon a divan to watch the scene over the way.

Abdul, falconer of Shammar, bearded and middle-aged, stood with a *shahin* of Jaraza upon his fist and a hooded eyess—which means a young hawk or nestling taken from the nest—of the same species upon a padded and spiked perch beside him, whilst hooded or with seeled eyes, upon perch or bough, were other yellow or dark-eyed birds of prey; short-winged hawks, a bearded vulture, a hobby, a passage Saker.

But it was not upon Abdul or his stock that the girl's eyes rested, nor, peradventure, the eyes behind the silken curtains.

The central figure of the glowing picture was that of Hugh Carden Ali, the eldest and best-beloved son of Hahmed the Sheikh el-Umbar and Jill, his beautiful, English and one and only wife; the son conceived in a surpassing love and born upon the desert sands.

"An Englishman," said Damaris softly as she withdrew yet further into the sheltering doorway and unleashed the dog; and still further back, when the man suddenly turned and looked across the Square as though in search of someone. "No! a native," she added, as she noticed the crimson *tarbusch*. "And yet . . ."

She was by no means the first to wonder as to the nationality of the man.

In riding-kit, with boots from Peter Yapp, he looked, except for the headcovering, exactly like an Englishman.

Certainly the shape of the face was slightly more oval than is common to the sons of a northern race, but nothing

really out of the ordinary, just as the eyes were an ordinary kind of brown, with a disconcerting way of looking suddenly into your face, sweeping it in an all-comprehensive lightning glance and looking indifferently away.

The nose was good and quite straight; the hair thick, brown and controllable; the mouth covering the perfect teeth was deceptive, or maybe it was the strength of the jaw which belied the gentleness, just as the slimness of the six-foot of body, trained to a hair from babyhood, gave no clue to the steel muscles underlying a skin as white as and a good deal whiter than that of some Europeans.

He moved with the quickness and quietness of those accustomed to the far horizon as a background; he was slow in speech; and dead-slow in anger until aroused by opposition.

For the physically weak-born, he had the gentle sympathy of the very strong; for the physically undeveloped and the morally weak he had no use whatever—*none*. In the West, his reserve with men had been labelled taciturnity or swollen-headedness, which did not fit the case at all; whilst, in spite of his perfect manner towards them, his indifference to woman *en masse* or in the individual was supreme and sincere.

He was the direct descendant of the founder of Nineveh where horses were concerned, and his stables in the Oasis of Khargegh would have been one of the sights of Egypt, had he permitted sightseers.

Educated at Harrow, where he had excelled in sport and captained the Eleven at Lord's for two succeeding years; respected by the upper Forms and worshipped by the lower,

he had developed the English side of his dual nationality until masters and schoolfellows had come to look upon him as one of themselves.

From Harrow he had gone to Brazenose; then had quite suddenly thrown up the 'Varsity and returned to Egypt.

Love?

Not at all, for was not his indifference to woman supreme and sincere?

Just the inevitable ending of a very commonplace, sordid little story which had taught the youth one of life's bitterest lessons.

One of a multitude of guests at Hurdley Castle, he had met a woman, beautiful but predatory, whose looks were taking on an autumnal tint, and whose banking account had shrivelled under the frost of extravagance.

His utter indifference to her wiles and her beauty had culminated in a degrading scene of anger on her part, when, forgetting her breeding, her birth and her nationality, she had first of all twitted him and then openly laughed at his mixed parentage.

He had stood without uttering a word, white to the lips during her tirade.

"Do you think that any white woman would marry you—a *half-caste*?" had cried the woman, whose bills were coming in in shoals.

"Yes, many," he had quietly answered as he bent to pick up her torn, handkerchief. "Am I not a rich man?"

He had returned to Egypt upon a visit to the Flat Oasis where dwelt his parents, who, though noting the indescribable hurt in the eyes of their firstborn, yet asked no

question, for in Egypt a youth is his own master and oftentimes married at the age of fourteen; how much more, therefore, is he a man at over twenty years?

He had visited his own house in the Oasis of Khargegh, with the purpose of putting his stables in order and his falconers through a stiff catechism, and had finally set out to see something of the world.

Not in a desire to cover his hurt, for he was as stoical as any high-bred Arab; and, Mohammedan from belief as well as early training, did not kick against what he looked upon as the commands of Allah.

As for women—well! The sweet, docile woman of his father's race interested him not at all, so that he refused to listen to any hint anent the desirability of his taking a wife and establishing the succession of the House 'an Mahabbha, which is the eldest branch of the House el-Umbar; and racial distinction barred him from the virile, lovely women of his mother's race.

He had his horses, his hawks, his hunting cheetahs, his dogs; one great treasure which he prized and one little conceit.

The treasure had been found in the ruins of the Temple Deir-el-Bahari. An ornament of gold set with precious stones. Its shape was that of the Hawk, which had stood as the symbol of the North in the glorious days of Ancient Egypt. The wings were of emeralds tipped with rubies; gold were the claws and gold the Symbol of Life they held; the body and tail were a mass of precious stones; and the eye of some jet-black stone, unknown to the present century.

As an ornament it was of great value; as an antiquity found in the Shrine of Anubis, the God of Death, its value could not even be guessed at; and how it had come into the possession of Hugh Garden Ali will never be known, though of a truth, unlimited wealth works wonders.

And upon his horses' saddle-cloths, his falcons' hoods, his hounds' coats, and the fine linen and satins of his Eastern raiment he had the emblem worked in thread or silk or jewels, or painted in soft colours.

It was just a pretty conceit, but in conjunction with one-half of his lineage and his love for his birds, it had earned him the title of "The Hawk of Egypt."

And such was the man as he stood in the market-place, having followed the path which Fate had marked out for him through the twisting lanes of the bazaar.

## CHAPTER II

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*"Dog, ounce, bear and bull, Wolf, lion, horse."*

## DU BARTAS.

Damaris should not have been strolling by herself in the native quarter.

If you are drab or flat of chest or soul or face, you can saunter your fill in any bazaar without adventure befalling you; if, however, nature should have endowed you with the colouring of a desert sunset, if, in short, you *can* add a splash of colour to anything so colourful as a native bazaar, then 'twere wise to do your sauntering under the wing of a vigilant chaperon, so that the curiosity and interest resultant on your splash may reach you obliquely and "as through a glass, darkly."

But there was no one to worry the girl at this hour before sunset, so that little by little and quite unconsciously she moved forward until she stood outside the doorway.

She stood, outlined against a background of blazing colours, which served in no way to dim her beauty. Through the yellow-white arch of the doorway showed a stretch of turquoise-blue sky across which, upon a string, swung

golden onions and scarlet peppercorns, whilst underneath ruminated a fine, superbly indifferent dromedary.

For a moment Hugh Carden Ali, jogged by Fate, looked straight across at the beautiful picture, staying his talk with Abdul, who, with the courtesy of the East, did not turn his head as he stroked the breast and head of the *shahin* on his fist.

But Damaris, with envy rampant in her heart, had no eyes for mere man; she wanted to walk across and get near the coal-black stallion from Unayza, a district famous for its breed of large, heavy-built horses. He stood impatiently, with an occasional plunk of a hoof on the sandy stones, or nuzzled his master's sleeve, or pulled at it with his teeth, whilst two shaggy dogs of Billi lay stretched out awaiting the signal to be up and going, perhaps, in a sprint across the desert after the *hosseney* or red rascal of a fox which had been trapped and caged for the sole purpose of hunting.

Ride out with the caged *hosseney* on a thoroughbred camel or thoroughbred horse, take with you a couple of greyhounds and a dog or so from Billi, get right off the tourist track and let the red rascal out, and see if you don't have some fun before breakfast.

Only get off the tourist track, else you will have all the bazaar camels and ponies loping along behind you.

The only wild beast this afternoon for sale was a jaguar, black as ink, smooth as satin, short, heavy, with half-closed green eyes fixed steadfastly upon a plump white pigeon foolishly strutting just out of reach of the steel-pointed claws.

"Take her upon thy fist, O Master," said Abdul of Shammar, as he lengthened the jesses, the short, narrow straps of leather or woven silk or cotton with which to hold the hawk. "See, she is well reclaimed, being tame and gentle and altogether amiable. When thrown, she is as a bullet from a rifle, binding her quarry in high air even as a man holds his woman to his heart upon the roof-top under the stars. She is full summed"—and he ran his slender fingers through the new feathers, full and soft after moulting; "she is keen as the winter wind—behold the worn and blunted nails; she will not give up, my master, yet will she come to the lure as quickly, as joyfully as a maid to her lover."

Hugh Carden Ali, the greatest authority after Abdul on the *shahin*, took the bird upon his fist, looked at the sunken, piercing eyes which were partially sealed; ran his hand over the narrow body, short tail and black back, and a finger over the large beak and deep mouth; held up the ugly face to the light, examined the flight-feathers and, moving his hand quickly up and down, caused the bird to flutter its wings—and so give him a chance of measuring the distance of the wings from the body. Finding her altogether lovely, he nodded and handed her back to the delighted falconer of Shammar, just as with a decisive pat the jaguar landed, its huge paw upon the strutting pigeon, which had forgotten to keep its distance.

For a moment the attention of the spectators, who were mostly squatting on their heels, was diverted from the master and the falconer. They laughed, they moved, whilst some in the back row stood up to see the fun, leaving for



one second an open space through which Damaris could see the fluttering white bird.

"Ah!" she cried, heartbroken at the sight; then, "Fetch!" she commanded the dog, pointing across the square.

Now, the dog, who had dispensed with his spiked collar on account of the heat, had no more idea than the man in the moon what he had to fetch for his beloved mistress; but, restless from prolonged inactivity and the smell of strange beasts, he hurled himself in the direction pointed; and his speed, once he got going, was as surprising as that of the elephant or rhinoceros and other clumsy-looking animals, and in very truth, his appearance was just as terrifying.

He crashed head-foremost into the back row of spectators, which, as one man, yelled and fled; tore along the path made clear for him, and sensing an enemy in the growling jaguar, was at its throat like a thrown spear; missing it by an inch as the black beast flung itself back to the full length of the steel chain which fastened it to an iron ring in the ground.

Damaris in her turn rushed, across the square, passing the astounded spectators, who salaamed as she ran. And as she ran she shouted:

"Let the animal loose," she cried. "Give it a chance; let it loose."

But Hugh Carden Ali, not in the least understanding the sudden onslaught, but with every sporting instinct uppermost, had already leant down in the seething, growling mass of fur and hate, and loosened the chain; whilst, with screams of fear and delight, the crowd raced for

the adjacent houses, from the upper windows of which they could hang in safety to watch the fight.

Disgusting?

Quite so! But have you ever heard of bull-fighting or pigeon-shooting in civilised, humane Europe?

There followed a frightful scene, during which Abdul, having picked up the pigeon, hastily flung his birds far behind the growling, spitting, raging couple, whilst the stallion, rearing in terror, nearly jerked his master, who had the bridle slipped over his arm, off his feet.

The two dogs of Billi and the two greyhounds leapt and barked and snapped at the belligerents until Wellington, taking an off-chance, suddenly turned and bit one of them clean through the shoulder; whereupon it yelped and howled and fled, whilst shouts of "*Ma sha-Allah*" and much clapping came from the upper windows.

Damaris ran straight towards the man, who, slipping the bridle, put both arms round her to draw her to safety; then, suddenly realising the beauty, the youth and the pure whiteness of her, as suddenly let her go.

"Shall I separate them?" he asked simply.

"No! Not even if you could. Once my dog's blood is up, nothing but death will satisfy him."

She stood quite still, as white as a sheet, with both hands on his arm, whilst the great dog hurled himself at the spitting brute, only to meet the teeth and claws which drew blood at every attempt, until the ground was crimson where they fought.

And then, with tears streaming down her cheeks, Damaris looked up into the man's face; then buried her face

on his shoulder.

And the seed of love which is in the heart of every human burst through, the clogging mould of custom and convention and, taking root, put forth shoots and sprang in one moment into the great tree of love of which the fruits, being those of purity, honour and sacrifice, are golden.

Yet he did not touch her, having learned his lesson; instead, he raised his right hand above his head.

"Allah!" he said, in praise of that which had come unto him, "Allah, there is no God but Thee," just as, with a sudden swish, a flock of startled pigeons flashing like jewels in the setting sun new low down across his head, bringing an end to the battle.

For one half-second the jaguar's green eyes shifted, and the dog was at its throat. There was a mighty, convulsive effort of the hind-legs which ripped the bulldog's sides, a click, a shiver, and the black brute fell dead, as the dog, a mass of blood, foam and pride, hurled himself onto the skirt of his beloved mistress, whilst the enraptured spectators, yelling with excitement, rushed out into the square with shouts of "*Ma sha-Allah*," which means, "Well done, well done!"

"Keep quite still," said Hugh Carden Ali, gently, as Damaris made an effort to turn; then, speaking quickly to the beaming, salaaming spectators, who had had the time of their lives gambling on the chances of either animal, ordered them to remove the dead beast and to strew the place with sand. And "*Irja Sooltan*," he called to the stallion, which, terrified at the sounds and sight and smell of battle, had bolted up a side street, where he stood fretting and

fidgiting himself into a fine sweat, until he heard the clear call which could always bring him back to the man he loved. He stood for one second, then flung up his heels to the devastation of a stall of earthenware, and raced back to the square at a most unseemly pace, causing the spectators once more to fly in all directions with cries of "U'a u'a," which means, "Look out, look out!"

He pushed his soft nose with determination against the woman who stood so close to his master, so that she looked up, and then smiled and stretched out her arms.

"You beauty!" she cried. "Oh, you *beauty!*"

"You ride?"

Damaris, thinking of the hack, the only thing with the shape of a horse she had been able to get so far, and upon the back of which she loathed to be seen, made a grimace.

"I go out on horseback," she said. "I have not ridden since I left home."

The man's reply, whatever it might have been, was interrupted by Abdul, who, all smiles, stood before them, with the white pigeon in the left hand and the *shahin* upon his right fist.

The native had no intention of causing the white woman pain; in fact, wishing to find favour in the eyes of the nobles, he only wanted to give them a chance of witnessing a little of, to him, the finest sport in the world.

"Look, lady!" he cried.

He tossed the pigeon high into the air, allowed her a little distance, then threw the hawk.

"No! Oh, no! don't!" cried Damaris, as the hawk rose, "stooped" and missed the pigeon by a hair's-breadth as it

"put in", which means that it flew straight into a small niche of a minaret for cover.

"Ah!" cried Damaris, and "*Bi-sma-Allah!*" ejaculated Abdul, as he threw the lure of a dead plover and called his hawk with the luring Eastern call. "Coo-coo," he called; "coo-coo," to which the hawk responded as a well-trained *shahin* should.

Hugh Carden Ali stood with his hand on the stallion's mane, looking up at the sky, in which shone a great star.

"The hawk of Egypt failed," he said to himself. "Flown at a white bird, it failed. The House of Allah, who is God, gave sanctuary to the little white bird. Praise be to Allah who is God."

He looked down at the girl, who was kneeling, consoling the dog, who, reft 'tween pride and pain, showed a lamentable countenance. Suddenly she looked up and rose, and stood silently.

"Come," he said simply, while he longed to pick her up and ride with her to his home in the Oasis. "I will take you to your hotel."

"My car is waiting for me in the Sikket el-Gedideh," she replied.

\* \* \* \* \*

Later, a vision of loveliness, she walked down the dining-room behind the Duchess of Longacres, whilst continuous lamentations were wafted through the spring-doors from the spot where sat a dog with sticking-plaster across his nose and middle girt with a cummerbund of pink boracic lint.

Beside the girl's place lay a huge bunch of crimson roses tied with golden tassels; there was no card, name nor

message.

She asked no question, neither did her godmother.

To what purpose should they? The one *knew*; the other firmly believed in allowing the young to work out the salvation of their own souls; which did not, however, mean that she would not keep a sharp look-out in the future over the troubled sea of Life.

"I knew something would happen," thought the wise old lady, as she passed a biscuit up to the parrot on her shoulder.

"*Kathir Khairak*," it said delightedly.

It merely means "thank you," but had taken weeks of teaching and repeating to master.

## CHAPTER III

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"Lor! but women's rum cattle to deal with, the first man found that to his cost; And I reckon it's just through a woman, that the last man on earth'll be lost."

### G. R. SIMS.

Damaris was the only daughter of Squire Hethencourt. Her mother was an Italian from the Udino, where the hair of the women is genuine Titian-red and the eyes are blue; which perhaps accounted for her colouring and some part of her temperament.

Her type of beauty was certainly remarkable—given, it must be confessed, to a certain amount of fluctuation—and she danced divinely, which gift must not be counted as a parlour-trick; she was slow in her movements and quiet in her manner until she talked of horses or anybody she loved; then her great eyes would flash and her laugh ring out, also she would gesticulate as her mother had been wont to do, until the climate, maybe, of a northern country had served to repress the spontaneity of her Latin mannerisms.

She was simple and unsophisticated and would have made a splendid little chum, if only one out of every three men who met her had not been consumed with a desire to annex her for life by means of a gold ring.

"Dads," she exclaimed, two months before the beginning of this story, having enticed him to her bedroom one night and offered him cream chocolates as he eat at the foot of her bed, facing her. "Dads, what am I to do? Guy Danvers says he is coming to see you to-morrow, and I—I am sure it will only turn out to be—well—you, know."

"But, Golliwog dear, I'm the one to be pitied. This makes the—how many is it?"

"I don't know, Dads, and it isn't the number; it's the awful *habit* they've got into—and I don't understand anything and I don't encourage them, do I? Do lend me a hankie—this chocolate has burst—and what am I to do?"

"Turn a deaf ear, or a cold shoulder, or put a brave face on, until———" said Dads, retrieving his handkerchief.

"Until what?"

"Until the right man comes along, darling, as he surely will."

The girl's lids suddenly dropped until the lashes lay like a fringe upon the white cheek over which very slowly but very surely crept the faintest of rose-colours.

"Hum!" said Dads to himself, as he made great use of the hankie.

"Do smoke, dearest!"

"No, thank you, pet; I couldn't here."

The man who worshipped his wife and adored his little daughter looked round the white and somewhat austere



room, and ran his eye over the bookstand at his elbow.

Books on horses, a treatise on bulldogs, the New Testament, essays in French and in German, the History of Egypt in Arabic, Budge's "Book of the Dead," and "King Solomon's Mines."

"But what am I do *meanwhile*, Dads?" and the girl threw out her hands imploringly.

"Be cold, deaf or brave, Golliwog, as I have suggested."

"But I've been all that, and it's quite useless. Do you think it would help if I let my hair grow and did it up in a tight knob?"

"I think it would help a lot if you shaved your head entirely, kiddie."

And the man leant forward and ran his hand through the red curls.

Once upon a time Damaris had read the advertisement of a certain powder guaranteed to darken hair of any colour, and life having been one long torment owing to her violent colouring, she had, greatly daring, acquired a packet; had followed the directions by mixing the powder with water and covering her head with the muddy result, and, "to make assurance doubly sure," had sat with her clay pate for an hour instead of ten minutes near a fire; had cracked the clay, washed her head, and found her hair grass-green.

She had chopped the verdant masses off without a thought, and had ever after refused to allow it to grow to hairpin length, and to her father only had granted the privilege of calling her by the pet name of Golliwog.

"Would you like to travel a bit, pet?" And the man smiled, though his heart was heavy at the thought of the blank

which his Golliwog's departure would leave in the home and the daily round.

"Travel! Travel! Oh! darling—to Egypt?"

"Why Egypt? Why not France or—or Italy?"

"Because I've *got* to go to Egypt sometime or another, Dads. I've got to see the desert and the mosques and the whites and blues and oranges and camels. It's *in me here*," and she thumped her nightgown above her heart. "I shall never be happy until I have seen them all. Oh! Dads, I wonder if you can understand; it—it sounds so—so silly ———"

"Tell me," and the man moved over to the head of the bed and took his daughter gently in his arms.

"I'm so out of the picture, somehow, here, dearest," said the child, striving as best she could to describe what was really only the passing of the border-line between girl and womanhood. "This terrible colouring of mine, for one thing. Why, amongst other girls, I am like a Raemaeker stuffed into a Heath Robinson folio, like a palette daubed with oils hung amongst a lot of water-colours. I want to find my own nail and hang for one hour by myself, if it's on a barn-door or the wall of a mosque—as long as I am by myself."

"Good Lord!" said the man inwardly, as he patted his daughter's arm; then, aloud. "As it happens, Golliwog darling, I had a letter from *Marraine* yesterday, asking me to let you go out to her in Cairo for the winter and see as much as possible of the ordinary sights. We'll talk it over with Mother to-morrow."

"Oh, Dads—how wonderful! And can't you and Mother come? And oh! *can* I take Wellington?"

"I think so, dear, if he hasn't hydrophobia," and the man bent to pat the head of the great dog which had crept from under the bed at the sound of his name.

And later Dads stood at his window, smoking two last pipes, whilst a glimpse into the future was allowed him.

"Can it be—can it possibly be," he said, puffing clouds of smoke into the creeper, to the annoyance of many insects, "Big Ben Kelham?—and the estates run alongside. Wonder if Teresa has noticed anything. And—by Jove!—of course!—he's at Heliopolis, getting over his hunting accident. I wonder——"

And Damaris sat at her window, with her arms round the dog, who longed inordinately for his mat.

"The desert," she whispered. "The pyramids—the bazaar—life—adventure. How *wonderful!*" There came a long, long pause, and then she added, as she turned towards a coloured picture of the Sphinx upon the wall, "And who cares if the nail is a tin-tack or a screw?"

As it happened, it was destined to be the jewel-hilted, double-edged, unsheathed dagger of love.

And Fate, having mislaid her glasses, worked her shuttle at hazard in and out of that picture of intricate pattern called Life, and having tangled and knotted together the crimson thread of passion, the golden thread of youth and the honest brown of a deep, undemonstrative love, she left the disentanglement of the muddle in the hands of Olivia, Duchess of Longacres.

Her Grace was over eighty.

Of a line of yeomen ancestors ranging back down the centuries to the William Carew who had fought for Harold,

she had been, about sixty-five years ago, the belle of Devon. Against the warnings of her heart and to the delight of her friends and family, she had married the Duke of Longacres, whose roving eye had been arrested by her beauty at a meet of the Devon and Somerset, and his equally roving heart temporarily captured by the indifference of her demeanour towards his autocratic self.

She had lost him, to all intents and purposes, two years after the marriage, but blinding her eyes and stuffing her ears, had held high her beautiful head and high her honour, filling her empty heart with the love of her son and the esteem of her legion of real friends; showing the bravest of beautiful faces to the world, until a happy widowhood had set her free.

Some years of absolute happiness of the simplest kind had followed; the marriage of her son and birth of her grandson, who had cost his mother her life. Then the following year had come the Boer War, and the heroic tragedy of Spion Kop, which left her childless; after that, many years of utter devotion, to her grandson, who adored her; then the Great War and the Battle of the Falkland Islands, which left her absolutely bereft, with the care of the boy's greatest treasure, even the grey parrot, Quarter-Deck, Dekko for short.

Methuselah of birds, it was possessed of an uncanny gift of human speech and understanding, and had been promoted through generation to generation, from sailing-vessel *via* Merchant Service to British Navy.

As time and tragedy worked hard together to silver her hair and line her face, so did a veritable imp of mischief,

bred of her desolation, seem to possess the old darling. She cared not a brass farthing for the opinion of her neighbours, so that after the death of the great Queen, who had been her staunchest friend, she had instructed Maria Hobson, her maid and also staunchest friend, to revive the faded roses of her cheeks with the aid of cosmetics. Things had gone from bad to worse in that respect, until her pretty snow-white hair had been covered by a flagrant golden perruque and the dear old face with a mask of pink and white enamel. Her eyes were blue, and keen as a hawk's, undimmed by the tears shed in secret during her tumultuous and tragic life; her teeth, each one in a perfect and pearly state of preservation, were her own, for which asset she was never given the benefit of the doubt; her tongue was vitriolic; her heart of pure gold, and she owned a right hand which said nothing to the left of the spaces between its fingers through which, daily ran deeds of kindness and streams of love towards the unfortunate ones of the earth.

Her dress was invariably of grey taffeta or brocade, bunched at the back and trailing on the ground; there were ruffles, of priceless lace at the elbow-sleeves and V-shaped neck; a plain straw poke-bonnet served for all outdoor functions, and an ebony stick, called "the wand" by the denizens of the slums, who adored her, completed her picturesque toilette.

The majority feared this *grande dame*, a minority, if they had had the chance, would have fawned upon her in public and laughed at or caricatured her in private; those who really knew her, and they lived principally east of London town, would willingly have laid themselves down and

allowed her ridiculously small feet, invariably shod in crimson, buckled, outrageously high-heeled shoes, to trample upon their prostrate bodies, if it would have given her pleasure so to do.

She adored young things, and had an enormous family of godsons and goddaughters, out of which crowd Ben Kelham and Damaris Hethencourt were supreme favourites, and about whom she had been weaving plots when she had written her letter of invitation to the Squire.

She smoked Three Castles, which she kept in a jewelled Louis XV snuff-box, and had a perfect tartar of a maid, who simply worshipped her.

Of a truth, a long description of a very old and very wise old woman, of whom the great Queen had once remarked to her Consort:

"I wish I were not a queen, so that I might curtsy to Olivia."

And in this wise old woman's jewel-covered hands Fate placed the twisted threads of passion, youth and love, and a wiser selection she could not have made.

A bronchitic cough had taken her to Cairo just as a sooted-up lung, left behind by the pneumonia which had followed the hunting accident had taken Ben Kelham to Heliopolis, and for recuperation of body or mind there is nothing to equal an Egyptian winter, even in a tourist-ridden centre.

Ben Kelham, Big Ben for short, on account of his six-feet-two, was heir to Sir Andrew Kelham, Bart., whose estate joined the lands of Squire Hethencourt, whom he looked upon as his greatest friend, and vice versa. Educated at