

# DARK HOLLOW

By ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

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SYNOPSIS.

A curious crowd of neighbors invade the mysterious home of Judge Ostrander, county judge and eccentric recluse, following a veiled woman who has gained entrance through the gates of the high double barriers surrounding the place. The woman has disappeared but the judge is found in a cataleptic state. Bela, his servant, appears in a dying condition and prevents entrance to a secret door. Bela dies. The judge awakes. Miss Weeks explains to him what has occurred during his seizure.

CHAPTER II—Continued.

"Let me hear her description, your honor."

The judge, who had withdrawn into the shadow, considered for a moment, then said:

"I cannot describe her features, for she was heavily veiled; neither can I describe her figure except to say that she is tall and slender. But her dress I remember. She wore purple; not an old woman's purple, but a soft shade which did not take from her youth. The child did not seem to belong to her, though she held her tightly by the hand. In age it appeared to be about six—or that was the impression I received before—"

The sergeant, who had been watching the speaker very closely, leaned forward with a hasty, inquiring glance expressive of something like consternation. Was the judge falling again into unconsciousness?

No; for the eyes which had gone blank had turned his way again, and only a disconnected expression which fell from the judge's lips showed that his mind had been wandering.

"It's not the same but another one; that's all."

Inconsequent words, but the sergeant meant to remember them, for with their utterance a change passed over the judge, and his manner, which had been constrained and hurried during his attempted description, became at once more natural and therefore more courteous.

"Do you think you can find her with such insufficient data? A woman dressed in purple, leading a little child?"

"Judge, I not only feel sure that I can find her, but I think she is found already. Do you remember the old tavern on the Rushville road? I believe they call it an inn now, or some such fancy name."

The judge sat quiet, but the sergeant, who dared not peer too closely, noticed a sudden constriction in the fingers of the hand with which his host fingered a paper cutter lying on the table between them.

"The one where—"

"I respect your hesitation, judge. Yes, the one run by the man you sentenced—"

A gesture had stopped him. He waited respectfully for the judge's next words.

They came quickly and with stern and solemn emphasis.

"For a hideous and wholly unprovoked crime. Why do you mention it and—his tavern?"

"Because of something I have lately heard in its connection. You know that the old house has been all made over since that time and run as a place of resort for automobilists in search of light refreshments. The proprietor's name is Yardley. We have nothing against him; the place is highly respectable. But it harbors a boarder, a permanent one, I believe, who has occasioned no little comment. No one has ever seen her face; unless it is the landlord's wife. She has all her meals served in her room, and when she goes out she wears the purple dress and purple veil you've been talking about. Perhaps she's your visitor of today. Hadn't I better find out?"

"Has she a child? Is she a mother?"

"I haven't heard of any child, but Mrs. Yardley has seven."

The judge's hand withdrew from the table and for an instant the room was so quiet that you could hear some far-off clock ticking out the minutes. Then Judge Ostrander rose and in a peremptory tone said:

"Tomorrow. After you hear from me again. Make no move tonight. Let me feel that all your energies are devoted to securing my privacy."

The sergeant, who had sprung to his feet at the same instant as the judge, cast a last look about him, curiosity burning in his heart and a sort of desperate desire to get all he could out of his present opportunity. For he felt absolutely sure that he would never be allowed to enter this room again.

But the arrangement of light was such as to hold in shadow all but the central portion of the room. With a sigh the sergeant dropped his eyes from the walls he could barely distinguish and, following Judge Ostrander's lead, passed with him under the torn folds of the curtain and through the narrow vestibule whose door was made of iron, into the room where, in a stronger blaze of light than they had left, lay the body of the dead negro awaiting the last rites.

Would the judge pass this body, or turn away from it toward a door leading front? The sergeant had come in at the rear, but he greatly desired to go out front, as this would give him so much additional knowledge of the

house. Unexpectedly to himself the judge's intentions were in the direction of his own wishes. He was led front; and, entering an old-fashioned hall dimly lighted, passed a staircase and two closed doors, both of which gave him the impression of having been shut upon a past it had pleased no one to revive in many years.

Beyond them was the great front door of colonial style and workmanship, a fine specimen once, but greatly disfigured now by the bolts and bars which had been added to it in satisfaction of the judge's ideas of security.

Many years had passed since Judge Ostrander had played the host; but he had not lost a sense of its obligations. It was for him to shoot the bolts and lift the bars; but he went about it so clumsily and with such evident aversion to the task that the sergeant instinctively sprang to help him.

"I shall miss Bela at every turn," remarked the judge, turning with a sad smile as he finally pulled the door open. This is an unaccustomed effort for me. Excuse my awkwardness."

Something in his attitude, something in the way he lifted his hand to push back a fallen lock from his forehead, impressed itself upon the sergeant's mind so vividly that he always remembered the judge as he appeared to him at that minute. Certainly there were but few men like him in the country, and none in his own town. Of a commanding personality by reason of his height, his features were of a cast to express his mental attributes and enforce attention, and the incongruity between his dominating figure and the apprehensions which he displayed in these multiplied and extraordinary arrangements for personal security was forcible enough to arouse any man's interest.

The sergeant was so occupied by the mystery of the man and the mystery of the house that they had passed the first gate (which the judge had unlocked without much difficulty) before he realized that there still remained something of interest for him to see and to talk about later. The two dark openings on either side, raised questions which the most unimaginative mind would feel glad to hear explained. Ere the second gate swung open and he found himself again in the street he had built up more than one theory in explanation of this freak of parallel fences with the strip of gloom between.

He would have felt the suggestion of the spot still more deeply had it been given him to see the anxious and hesitating figure which, immediately upon his departure entered this dark maze, and with feeling hands and cautious step wound its way from corner to corner—now stopping abruptly to listen, now shrinking from some imaginary presence—a shadow among shadows—till it stood again between the gates from which it had started.

CHAPTER III.

Across the Bridge.

It was ten o'clock, not later, when the judge re-entered his front door. He was alone—absolutely alone, as he had never been since that night of long ago, when with the inner fence completed and the gates all locked, he turned to the great negro at his side and quietly said:

"We are done with the world, Bela. Are you satisfied to share this solitude with me?" And Bela had replied: "Night and day, your honor. And when you are not here—when you are at court, to bear it alone."

And now this faithful friend was dead, and it was he who must bear it alone—alone! How could he face it! He sought for no answer, nor did he allow himself to dwell for one minute on the thought. There was something else he must do first—do this very night, if possible.

Taking down his hat from the rack, he turned and went out again, this time carefully locking the door behind him, also the first gate. But he stopped to listen before lifting his hand to the second one.

A sound of steady breathing, accompanied by a few impatient movements, came from the other side. A man was posted there within a foot of the gate. Noiselessly the judge recoiled and made his way around to the other set of gates. Here all was quiet enough, and, sliding quickly out, he cast a hasty glance up and down the lane, and, seeing nothing more alarming than the back of a second officer lounging at the corner, pulled the gate quietly to and locked it.

He was well down the road toward the ravine before the officer turned.

The time has now come for giving you a clearer idea of this especial neighborhood. Judge Ostrander's house, situated at the juncture of an unimportant road with the main highway, had in its rear three small houses, two of them let and one still unrented. Farther on, but on the opposite side of the way, stood a very old dwelling, in which there lived and presumably worked a solitary woman, the sole and final survivor of a large family. Beyond was the ravine, cutting across the road and terminating it. This ravine merits some description.

It was a picturesque addition to the town through which it cut at the point of greatest activity. With the various bridges connecting the residence portion with the lower business streets we have nothing to do. But there was a nearer one, of which the demands of this story necessitate a clear presentation.

This bridge was called Long, and spanned the ravine and its shallow stream of water not a quarter of a mile below the short road or lane we have just seen Judge Ostrander enter. Between it and this lane, a narrow path ran amid the trees and bushes bordering the ravine. This path was seldom used, but when it was it acted as a short cut to a certain part of the town mostly given over to factories. Indeed the road of which this bridge formed a part was called Factory on this account. Starting from the main highway a half-mile or so below Ostrander lane, it ran diagonally back to the bridge, where it received a turn



Cast a Hasty Glance Up and Down the Lane.

which sent it south and east again toward the lower town. A high bluff rose at this point, which made the farther side of the ravine much more imposing than the one on the near side, where the slope was gradual.

This path, and even the bridge itself, were almost wholly unlighted. They were seldom used at night—seldom used at any time. But it was by this route the judge elected to go into town; not for the pleasure of the walk, as was very apparent from the extreme depression of his manner, but from some inward necessity which drove him on, against his wishes, possibly against his secret misgivings.

He had met no one in his short walk down the lane, but for all that he paused before entering the path just mentioned, to glance back and see if he were being watched or followed. When satisfied that he was not he looked up from the solitary waste where he stood, to the cheerless heavens and sighed; then forward into the mass of impenetrable shadow that he must yet traverse and shuddered as many another had shuddered ere beginning this walk. For it was near the end of this path, in full sight of the bridge he must cross, that his friend, Algernon Etheridge, had been set upon and murdered so many years before; and the shadow of this ancient crime still lingered over the spot.

Determined not to stop or to cast one faltering look to right or left, he hurried on with his eyes fixed upon the ground and every nerve braced to resist the influence of the place and its undying memories. But with the striking of his foot against the boards of the bridge nature was too much for him, and his resolve vanished. Instead of hastening on he stopped, and, having stopped, paused long enough to take in all the features of the scene and any changes which time might have wrought. He even forced his shrinking eyes to turn and gaze upon the exact spot where his beloved Algernon had been found, with his sightless eyes turned to the sky.

This latter place, singular in that it lay open to the opposite bank without the mask of bush or tree to hide it, was in immediate proximity to the end of the bridge he had attempted to cross. It bore the name of Dark Hollow, and hollow and dark it looked in the universal gloom. But the power of its associations was upon him, and before he knew it he was retracing his steps as though drawn by a magnetism he could not resist, till he stood within this hollow and possibly on the very foot of ground from the mere memory of which he had recoiled for years.

A moment of contemplation—a sigh, such as only escapes the bursting heart in moments of extreme grief or desolation—and he tore his eyes from the

ground to raise them slowly but with deep meaning, to something which rose from the brow of the hill in stark and curious outline not explainable in itself, but clear enough to one who had seen its shape by daylight. Judge Ostrander had thus seen it many times in the past, and knew just where to look for the one remaining chimney and solitary gable of a house struck many years before by lightning and left a grinning shell to mock the eye of all who walked this path or crossed this bridge.

Black amid blackness, with just the contrast of its straight lines to the curve of natural objects about it, it commanded the bluff, summoning up memories of an evil race-cut short in a moment by an outraged Providence, and Judge Ostrander, marking it, found himself muttering aloud as he dragged himself slowly away: "Why should Time, so destructive elsewhere, leave one stone upon another of this accursed ruin?"

When he had reached the middle of the bridge he stopped short to look back at Dark Hollow and utter in a smothered groan, which would not be repressed, a name which by all the rights of the spot should have been Algernon's, but was not.

The utterance of this name seemed to startle him, for, with a shuddering look around, he hastily traversed the rest of the bridge and took the turn about the hill to where Factory road branched off toward the town. Here he stopped again and for the first time revealed the true nature of his destination. For when he moved on again it was to take the road along the bluff, and not the one leading directly into town.

This meant a speedy passing by the lightning-struck house. He knew, of course, and evidently shrank from the ordeal, for once upon the hill and on the level stretch above, he resolutely forbore to cast a glance at its dilapidated fence and decayed gate posts. Had he not done this—had his eyes followed the long line of the path leading from these tottering posts to the face of the ruin, he would have been witness to a strange sight. For gleaming through the demolished heart of it—between the chimney on the one side and the broken line of the gable on the other—could be seen the half-circle of the moon suddenly released from the clouds which had hitherto enshrouded it. A weird sight, to be seen only when all conditions favored. It was to be seen here tonight; but the judge's eye was bent another way, and he passed on, unnoting.

The ground was high along this bluff; almost fifty feet above the level of the city upon which he had just turned his back. Of stony formation and much exposed, to the elements, it had been considered an undesirable site by builders, and not a house was to be seen between the broken shell of the one he had just left, and the long, low, brilliantly illuminated structure ahead, for which he was evidently making.

The pant of a dozen motors, the shouting of various far-aways and then the sudden rushing forth of a long line of automobiles proclaimed that the fete of the day was about over and that peace and order would soon prevail again in Claymore Inn.

Without waiting for the final one to pass, the judge slid round to the rear and peered in at the kitchen door.

Three women were at work in this busiest of scenes, and the three women's heads came simultaneously together. There was reason for their whispers. His figure, his head, his face were all unusual, and at that moment highly expressive, and coming as he did out of the darkness, his presence had an uncanny effect upon their simple minds. They had been laughing before; they ceased to laugh now. Why?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Not Taught to Spell in Austria.

The search for information on the pronunciation of some of the strangely spelled towns involved in the European situation has brought some facts that throw light on the public policies pursued by the Austrians towards those subject to them. In this city, lately, a well appearing, well-to-do subject of Austria-Hungary was approached by a man who wanted some of these jawbreaking words pronounced for him. The Austrian did not seem to be an ignorant man. He spoke good English, but he confessed that he could give no help. "I might recognize the name of the town if I heard it spoken," he said, "but I cannot identify it by the spelling. You see, we are not taught to spell at home, and I know nothing that will help."—Philadelphia Record.

"Noblesse Oblige."

None of us have a right to look with contempt upon those who have received less than ourselves. The old motto of chivalry, "noblesse oblige," should be the motto of all who by money or social position or some special talent have an advantage over their fellows. Those who acknowledge the obligation thereby prove their nobility.

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