

DARK HOLLOW

By ANNA KATHARINE GREEN
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SYNOPSIS.

A curious crowd of neighbors invade the mysterious home of Judge Ostrander, a reclusive and eccentric recluse, following a veiled woman who has gained entrance through the gates of the place. The woman has disappeared but the Judge, who appears in a dying condition and is carried to a secret door. Judge Ostrander awakes. Miss Weeks explains to him what has occurred during the night. He secretly discovers the whereabouts of the veiled woman. She proves to be the widow of a man tried and executed for the murder of a young boy years before. Her daughter is engaged to the Judge's son, from whom he is estranged, but the murder is between the two. She plans to clear her husband's memory and asks the Judge's aid. Alone in her room Deborah Scoville reads the newspaper clippings telling the story of the murder of Aigron Etheridge by John Scoville in Dark Hollow, twelve years before.

CHAPTER VI—Continued.

"Ah, Judge Ostrander," she exclaimed in a hasty but not ungraceful greeting, "you are very punctual. I was not looking for you yet." Then, as she noted the gloom under which he was laboring, she continued with real feeling, "Indeed, I appreciate this sacrifice you have made to my wishes. It was asking a great deal of you to come here; but I saw no other way of making my point clear. Come over here, Peggy, and build me a little house out of these stones. You don't mind the child, do you, Judge? She may offer a diversion if our retreat is thwarted."

The gesture of disavowal which he made was courteous but insincere. He did mind the child, but he could not explain why; besides, he must overcome such folly.

"Now," she continued as she repeated him on the place where he had taken his stand, "I will ask you to go back with me to the hour when John Scoville left the tavern on that fatal day. I am not now on oath, but I might as well be for any slip I shall make in the exact truth. I was making pies in the kitchen, when some one came running in to say that Reuther had strayed away from the front yard. And here I found her, sir, right in the heart of these ruins. She was playing with stones just as Peggy dear is doing now. Greatly relieved, I was taking her away when I thought I heard John calling. Stepping up to the edge close behind where you are standing, sir—yes, there, where you saw and a broad outcrop up and down the ravine—I glanced, in the direction from which I had heard his call—just at that moment, sir; I want to know the exact time."

Stopping, she pulled out her watch and looked at it, while he, faltering to the verge which she had pointed out, followed her movements with strange intensity as she went on to give an explanation of her act:

"The time is important, on account of a certain demonstration I am anxious to make. Now if you will lean a little forward and look where I am pointing, you will notice at the turn of the stream a spot of ground more open than the rest. Please keep your eyes on that spot, for it was there I saw at this very hour twelve years ago the shadow of an approaching figure; and it is there you will presently see one similar, if the boy I have tried to interest in this experiment does not fail me. Now, now, sir! We should see his shadow before we see him. Oh, I hope the underbrush and trees have not grown up too thick! I tried to thin them out today. Are you watching, sir?"

He seemed to be, but she dared not turn to look. Both figures leaned, and in another moment she had gripped his arm and clung there.

"Did you see?" she whispered. "Don't mind the boy; it's the shadow I wanted you to notice. Did you observe anything marked about it?"

She had drawn him back into the ravine. They were standing in that secluded corner under the ruin of a gable, and she was gazing up at him very earnestly. "Tell me, Judge," she entreated as he made no effort to answer.

With a hurried moistening of his lips, he met her look and responded, with a slight emphasis:

"The boy held a stick. I should have thought he was whittling it."

"Ah!" Her tone was triumphant. "What was what I told him to do. Did you see anything else?"

"No. I do not understand this experiment or what you hope from it."

"I will tell you. The shadow which I saw at a moment very like this, twelve years ago, showed a man whittling a stick and wearing a cap with a decided peak in front. My husband wore such a cap—the only one I know of in town. What more could I need as proof that it was his shadow I saw?"

"And wasn't it?"

"Judge Ostrander, I never thought I should find the earth closed over my poor husband's remains. That was why I should say nothing in his defense—"

"I did not believe him when he declared that he had left his stick behind Reuther. But later, when it was found over, when the disgrace of his death and the necessity of seeking a home elsewhere drove me into sell-

ing the tavern and all its effects, I found something which changed my mind in this regard, and made me confident that I had done my husband a great injustice."

"You found? What do you mean by that? What could you have found?"

"His peaked cap lying in a corner of the parlor. He had not worn it that day; for when he came back he was without hat of any kind, and he never returned again to his home—you know that, Judge. I had seen the shadow of some other man approaching Dark Hollow. Whose, I am in this town now to find out."

Judge Ostrander was a man of keen perception, quick to grasp an idea, quick to form an opinion. But his mind acted slowly tonight. Deborah Scoville wondered at the blankness of his gaze and the slow way in which he seemed to take in this astounding fact.

At last he found voice and with it gave some evidence of his usual acumen.

"Madam, a shadow is an uncertain foundation on which to build such an edifice as you plan. A dozen men might have come down that path with or without sticks before Mr. Etheridge reached the bridge and fell a victim to the assault which laid him low."

"I thought the time was pretty clearly settled by the hour he left your house. The sun had not set when he turned your corner on his way home. So several people said who saw him. Besides—"

"Yes; there is a 'besides.' I'm sure of it."

"I saw the tall figure of a man, whom I afterwards made sure was Mr. Etheridge, coming down Factory road on his way to the bridge when I turned about to get Reuther."

"All of which you suppressed at the trial."

"I was not questioned on this point, sir."

"Madam"—he was standing very near to her now, hemming her as it were into that decaying corner—"I should have a very much higher opinion of your candor if you told me the whole story."

"I have, sir." His hands rose, one to the right-hand wall, the other to the left, and remained there with their palms resting heavily against the rotting plaster. She was more than ever hemmed in; but, though she felt a trifle frightened at his aspect, which certainly was not usual, she faced him without shrinking and in very evident surprise.

"It seems too slight a fact to mention, and, indeed, I had forgotten it till you pressed me, but after we had passed the gates and were well out on the highway, I found that Reuther had left her little pail behind her here, and we came back and got it. Did you mean that, sir?"

"I meant nothing; but I felt sure you had not told all you could about that fatal ten minutes. You came back. It is quite a walk from the man whose shadow you saw must have reached the bridge by this time. What did you see then or hear?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing, Judge. I was intent on finding the baby's pail, and having found it I hurried back home all the faster."

"And tragedy was going on or was just completed, in plain sight from this gap!"

"I have no doubt, sir; and if I had looked, possibly John might have been saved."

The silence following this was broken by a crash and a little cry. Peggy's house had tumbled down.

The small incident was a relief. Both assumed more natural postures.

"So the shadow is your great and only point," remarked the Judge.

"I shall not desist, Judge Ostrander."

"You are going to pursue this jack-o'-lantern?"

"I am determined to. If you deny me aid and advice I shall seek another counselor. John's name must be vindicated."

He gave her a look, turned and glanced down at the child piling stone on stone and whimpering just a little when they fell.

"Watch that baby for a while," he remarked, "and you will learn the lesson of most human endeavor. Madam, I have a proposition to make you. You cannot wish to remain at the inn, nor can you be long happy separated from your daughter. I have lost Bela. I do not know how, nor would I be willing to replace him by another servant. I need a housekeeper; some one devoted to my interests and who will not ask me to change my habits too materially. Will you accept the position, if I add as an inducement my desire to have Reuther also as an inmate of my home? This does not mean that I countenance or in any way anticipate her union with my son. I do not; but any other advantages she may desire she shall have. I will not be strict with her."

Deborah Scoville was never more taken aback in her life. The recluse opening his doors to two women! The man of mystery flinging aside the reticences of years to harbor an inno-

cence which he refused to let weigh against the claims of a son he had seen fit to banish from his heart and home!

"You may take time to think of it," he continued, as he watched the confused emotions change from moment to moment the character of her mobile features. "I shall not have my affairs adjusted for such a change before a week. If you accept I shall be very grateful. If you decline I shall close up my two rear gates, and go into solitary seclusion. I can cook a meal if I have to."

And she saw that he would do it; saw and wondered still more.

"I shall have to write to Reuther," she murmured. "How soon do you want my decision?"

"In four days."

"I am too disturbed to thank you, Judge. Should—should we have to keep the gates locked?"

"No. But you would have to keep out unwelcome intruders. And the rights of my library will have to be respected. In all other regards I should wish, under these new circumstances, to live as other people live. I have been very lonely these past twelve years."

"I will think about it."

"And you may make note of these two conditions: Oliver's name is not to be mentioned in my hearing, and you and Reuther are to be known by your real names."

"You would—"

"Yes, madam. No secrecy is to be maintained in future as to your identity or my reasons for desiring you in my house. I need a housekeeper and you please me. That you have a past to forget and Reuther a disappointment to overcome gives additional point to the arrangement."

Her answer was:

"I cannot take back what I have said about my determined purpose." In repeating this she looked up at him askance.

He smiled. She remembered that smile long after the interview was over and only its memory remained.

Dearest Mother: Where could we go that disgrace would not follow us? Let us then accept the Judge's offer. I am the more inclined to do this because of the possible hope that some day he may come to care for me and allow me to make life a little brighter for him. The fact that for some mysterious reason he feels himself cut off from all intercourse with his son, may prove a bond of sympathy between us. I, too, am cut off from all companionship with Oliver. Between us also a wall is raised. Do not mind that tear-dropping, mamma. It is the last.

Kisses for my comforter. Come soon.—REUTHER.

Over this letter Deborah Scoville sat for two hours, then she rang for Mrs. Yardley.

The maid who answered her summons surveyed her in amazement. It

was the first time that she had seen her uncovered face.

Mrs. Yardley was not long in coming up.

"Mrs. Averill—" she began, in a kind of fuster, as she met her strange guest's quiet eye.

But she got no further. That guest had a correction to make.

"My name is not Averill," she protested. "You must excuse the temporary deception. It is Scoville. I once occupied your present position in this house."

Mrs. Yardley had heard all about the Scovilles; and, while a flush rose to her cheeks, her eyes snapped with sudden interest.

"Ah!" came in quick exclamation, followed, however, by an apologetic cough and the somewhat forced and conventional remark: "You find the place changed, no doubt?"

"Very much so, and for the better, Mrs. Yardley." Then, with a straight forward meeting of the other's eye, she quietly added, "I am going to live

with Judge Ostrander, Mrs. Yardley—keep house for him, myself and daughter. His man is dead and he feels very helpless. I hope that I shall be able to make him comfortable."

Mrs. Yardley's face was a study. In all her life she had never heard news that surprised her more. In another moment she had accepted the situation, like the very sensible woman she was, and Mrs. Scoville had the satisfaction of seeing the promise of real friendly support in the smile with which Mrs. Yardley remarked:

"It's a good thing for you and a very good thing for the Judge. It may shake him out of his habit of seclusion. If it does, you will be the city's benefactor. Good luck to you, madam. And you have a daughter, you say?"

After Mrs. Yardley's departure Mrs. Scoville, as she now expected herself to be called, sat for a long time brooding. There was one thing more to be accomplished. She set about it that evening.

Velled, but in black now, she went into town. Getting down at the corner of Colburn avenue and Perry street, she walked a short distance on Perry, then rang the bell of an attractive-looking house of moderate dimensions. Being admitted, she asked to see Mr. Black, and for an hour sat in close conversation with him. Then she took a trolley car which carried her into the suburbs. When she alighted, it was unusually late for a woman to be out alone; but she had very little physical fear, and walked on steadily enough for a block or two till she came to a corner, where a high fence loomed forbiddingly between her and a house so dark that it was impossible to distinguish between its chimneys and the encompassing trees.

Was she quite alone in the seemingly quiet street? She could hear no one, see no one. A lamp burned in front of Miss Weeks' small house, but the road it illumined, the one running down to the ravine, showed only darkened houses.

She had left the corner and was passing the gate of the Ostrander homestead, when she heard, coming from some distant point within, a low and peculiar sound which held her immovable for a moment, then sent her on shuddering.

It was the sound of hammering. Hearing this sound and locating it where she did, she remembered, with a quick inner disturbance, that the judge's house held a secret; a secret of such import to its owner that the dying Bela had sought to preserve it at the cost of his life.

Oh, she had heard all about that! The gossip at Claymore inn had been great, and nothing had been spared her curiosity. There was something in this house which it behooved the judge to secrete from sight yet more completely before her own and Reuther's entrance, and he was at work upon it now, hammering with his own hand while other persons slept! No wonder she edged her way along the fence with a shrinking, yet persistent, step. She was circling her future home and that house held a mystery.

As she groped her way along, she had ample opportunity to hear again the intermittent sounds of the hammer, and to note that they reached their maximum at a point where the ell of the judge's study approached the fences.

Rat-tat-tat; rat-tat-tat. She hated the sound even while she whispered to herself:

"It is just some household matter he is at work upon—re-hanging pictures or putting up shelves. It can be nothing else."

Yet on laying her ear to the fence she felt her sinister fears return; and, with shrinking glances into a darkness which told her nothing, she added in fearful murmur to herself:

"What am I taking Reuther into? I wish I knew. I wish I knew."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

ROYAL IN ITS MAGNIFICENCE

"Founder's Room" in Pittsburgh Carnegie Library is a Splendid Apartment.

A recent report of the Pittsburgh Carnegie library contains a picture of the "founder's room," of which a writer in the Boston Evening Transcript says:

"It seems to be a vast apartment, about fifty or sixty yards long and nearly as wide. It has indirect lighting and a flagged floor, upon which one might play hopscotch if one felt inclined. There are four or five thrones in the room, one on each side of the fireplace, and there is a table with a lamp on it. The room is very magnificent; it has all the spaciousness and discomfort of a royal palace."

"What Mr. Carnegie does in this room we are not told. There are no sleeping accommodations, unless one of the thrones is really a folding bed. It does not look cozy enough to use for an office."

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"If You Deny Me I Shall Seek Another Counsellor."

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