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NAXOS
AudioBooks

CLASSIC
FICTION

H. Rider Haggard

SHE

A HISTORY OF
ADVENTURE

Read by **Bill Homewood**

1	In giving to the world the record of what...	6:25
2	It was in this very month, something over twenty years ago...	5:24
3	I sprang almost out of my chair.	4:32
4	He paused a while, his head sunk upon his hand...	4:20
5	As it seemed to me, I had only been asleep...	4:09
6	At length the child arrived...	4:23
7	On the day preceding Leo's twenty-fifth birthday...	5:41
8	The next thing that I found was a parchment...	7:42
9	Thus the letter, which was unsigned and undated...	6:26
10	Then came what was perhaps as curious an entry...	5:28
11	How different is the scene that I have now to tell...	3:35
12	I felt the dhow sinking under me...	4:28
13	At length the heralds and forerunners of the royal sun...	5:50
14	Accordingly, having carefully fitted the mast...	4:22
15	I do not quite know what it was that made me...	6:17
16	Turning back, we walked some way along the banks...	5:04
17	I suppose I must have slept for seven or eight hours...	6:57
18	When the 'kissing' operation was finished...	4:39
19	The night passed very comfortably on the whole...	7:08
20	On the day following this remarkable scene...	5:43

21	For a moment there was a silence of astonishment...	5:52
22	When I opened my eyes again...	6:13
23	It took us an hour and more to cross...	3:45
24	By dawn on the following morning...	6:52
25	We found ourselves in a huge rock-surrounded cup...	6:10
26	When we had eaten we returned...	5:22
27	At length the curtain began to move.	6:11
28	'There,' said She, 'he has gone...'	6:11
29	I rose and gazed, and instantly the water darkened.	3:16
30	'Hast thou aught to ask me before thou goest...'	5:13
31	It was nearly ten o'clock at night...	4:15
32	I was at the curtains, and they did not hang close...	5:11
33	The next thing that I remember...	6:46
34	After the prisoners had been removed...	7:21
35	We left the place and entered others.	4:30
36	'So, my Holly, sit there where thou canst see me.'	4:15
37	Accordingly, I went, only to find Job and Ustane...	6:38
38	Then followed a silence of a minute or so...	6:11
39	That night I passed in Leo's room...	5:29
40	Presently, however, this pleasing piece was interrupted.	5:38

41	In due course we gained Ayesha's boudoir...	6:40
42	Suddenly, with a snake-like motion...	5:02
43	With a sudden motion she drew the shroud from the cold form...	6:11
44	It was nine o'clock on the following morning...	4:53
45	In a few minutes' time we were stepping out...	4:11
46	Of course we got up at once and started...	4:37
47	Next day the mutes woke us before the dawn.	5:30
48	At last, however, we halted at its farther end...	5:39
49	And now, by this ray of light...	7:18
50	But Ayesha merely called to me to take her hand...	6:08
51	She paused, and the strange tenderness in her voice...	6:50
52	We stood in a third cavern...	5:31
53	At last, from far far away, came the first murmur...	3:29
54	As soon as it was gone, she stepped forward...	4:36
55	I know not how long we remained thus.	5:58
56	We passed through the caves without trouble.	6:15
57	It was early morning...	8:18

Total time: 5:17:34

H. Rider Haggard

(1856–1925)

SHE

A HISTORY OF ADVENTURE

Those who have read or listened to Sir Henry Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* will have felt the emptiness one always feels at the end of a good book – not simply at the sudden loss of a good read, something to while away the time, but rather a kind of bereavement, having spent so many hours in the company of compelling characters. Our narrator, the hunter Allan Quatermain, has become a close friend by the end of the story, having shared with us his heart, as well as his deeds. At the end, of course, we are also suddenly deprived of Africa – Rider Haggard's Africa – an Africa of magic, mystery and adventure, of wild animals

and lost tribes, of Nature at her most red in tooth and claw.

In *She* we are invited once again to escape into this world, and within five pages are willingly packing our bags to travel with the indomitable Mr Holly, to follow a trail of clues and half-legends, to be shipwrecked, to travel on foot through some of the most forbidding terrain on the planet, to witness cruel torture and death, to be attacked and captured, and, probably breathless with terror, to meet the beautiful semi-goddess Ayesha, the *She* of the title, richly portrayed as a sort of cross between the Queen of Sheba and Medusa. She presents herself exotically:

'...Arabian am I by birth, even "al Arab al Ariba" (an Arab of the Arabs), and of the race of our father Yarab, the son of Kahtan, for in that fair and ancient city Ozal was I born, in the province of Yaman the Happy...'

Sir Henry Rider Haggard draws liberally on ancient history and legend for the background. His narrator, Ludwig Horace Holly, is an academic and putative Fellow of a Cambridge University college, who presents the tale as a memoir for publication. The story itself is thrilling and rolls along at high speed, often going from triumph to catastrophe in a page.

In *The Da Vinci Code*, and in subsequent books, author Dan Brown makes extensive use of cryptic visual and literary clues to lure the reader in as detective. In *She*, written over a century earlier, the chase is doubly exciting because we are allowed to interpret these and yet be suspicious of them, as Holly himself is. He remains firmly unconvinced that humanity may have as-yet-untapped powers of longevity, until events lead him to question this.

The style is always elegant, and often poetic. Sometimes the style is elegiac and philosophical.

As in *King Solomon's Mines*, Rider Haggard is perfunctory in his descriptions of animal deaths. However, when it comes to humans, Rider Haggard spares us very little detail, though Holly's self-deprecation at times rescues us from the horror:

Lying on my back there, so that their bodies might protect me from spear thrusts from above, I slowly crushed the life out of them, and as I did so, strange as it may seem, I thought of what the amiable Head of my College at Cambridge (who is a member of the Peace Society) and my brother Fellows would say if by clairvoyance they could see me, of all men, playing such a bloody game.

The comical, anachronistic references to home may make us laugh, but they add to the tension. On encountering his first cannibal, Holly is outraged:

'In our country we entertain a stranger, and give him food to eat. Here, ye eat him, and are entertained.' 'It is a custom,' he answered, with a shrug, '...but then... I do not like the taste of strangers...'

Rider Haggard was a contemporary of H.G. Wells, Rudyard Kipling and Robert Louis Stevenson, and his novels take us to exotic places, like those of Kipling and Stevenson; but he shares a love of mystery, of 'other-worldliness', with Wells. In the 19th century *She* would certainly not have been described as 'A book for boys' – Rider Haggard's own description of *King Solomon's Mines*. Rider Haggard is expert at portraying the sensual and the erotic without crude strokes of the pen; and he is never coy, always honest, bold and painterly:

ankles more perfect than ever sculptor dreamed of... I might talk of the great changing eyes of deepest, softest black, of the tinted face, of the broad and noble brow... a godlike stamp of softened power, which

shone upon that radiant countenance like a living halo...

The complete unveiling of Ayesha is one of the most erotic passages in English literature. Ayesha represents the timeless object of male erotic longing, and yet is never submissive, coy or artfully seductive; she is absolutely dominant. Her other name is *She-who-must-be-obeyed*.

It would not be a fruitless exercise to analyse this in the light of the sexual politics of Victorian, and even early 20th-century, England. In the character of Holly we have a man who, by his own admission, is 'branded by Nature with the stamp of abnormal ugliness...' This man never hopes to experience reciprocal love, and yet is allowed intimate time with the goddess. The episode is moving because – such is Rider Haggard's skill – we admire Ludwig Horace Holly for his courage, his candour and his humility, and he deserves to be loved. By the end of the book, Ludwig Horace Holly, now a Fellow of his Cambridge college, seems to us a great man, and our friend.

Henry Rider Haggard was born in 1856. His mother was an amateur novelist and his father a barrister and country gentleman. Henry was sent to Ipswich Grammar School, before taking a post in South Africa as secretary to Sir Henry Bulwer, Governor of Natal. At the age of 22 he was appointed Registrar of the Natal High Court, at which time he fell in love with an African woman, and became fascinated by Zulu culture and traditions. It is interesting that both *King Solomon's Mines* and *She* feature a loving, brave, black African woman. He returned briefly to England and married a Norfolk heiress, Mariana Louisa Margitson, taking her back to South Africa where they ran an ostrich farm. Eventually, with the intention of pursuing a career in the law, he moved back to Norfolk with Mariana, and was called to the bar at the age of 28.

Perhaps there was more of his mother in him than his father, for it was not long before he gave up his practice in order to write novels of adventure and discovery. He was excited by Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, published in 1883, and wrote *King Solomon's Mines*

in less than a week. *She*, with its cryptic clues, facsimiles, and Latin and Greek sections, took six weeks. He dedicated the book to his friend, the mythologist and writer Andrew Lang. Rider Haggard became an expert agriculturalist and among the 40 books which he wrote in a long career, there were several on farming. For his services to the British Empire, both diplomatic and agricultural, he was knighted in 1912 and awarded the KCBE in 1919. He died in London in 1925.

Notes by Bill Homewood



Bill Homewood's West End credits include leads in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Grand Hotel*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *The Boys From Syracuse*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Hollow Crown* (Royal Shakespeare Company). His innumerable television series include *The Professionals*, *Berkeley Square*, *A Wing and a Prayer*, *The Renford Rejects*, *London's Burning*, *Casualty*, *Coronation Street*, *Crocodile Shoes*, *The Bill* and *Spy Trap*. Bill also directs theatre in the USA, the UK, and France, where he runs a ranch with his wife Estelle Kohler. His recordings for Naxos AudioBooks include *Les Misérables*, *King Solomon's Mines* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

Credits

Edited and mastered by Sarah Butcher

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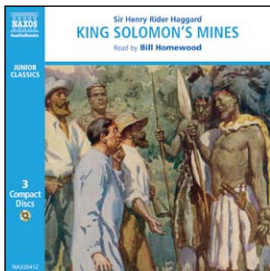
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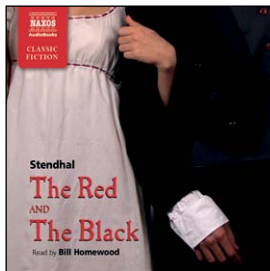
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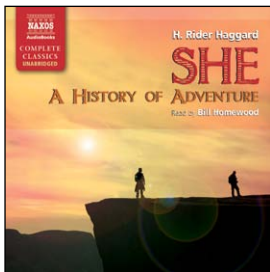
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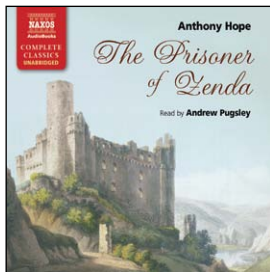
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H. Rider Haggard

SHE

A HISTORY OF ADVENTURE

Read by **Bill Homewood**

Somewhere in Africa, a tiny, primitive tribe, the Amahaggers, live secretly amongst the debris of a lost Egyptian civilization, ruled by the beautiful semi-goddess Ayesha, or She-who-must-be-obeyed. Ludwig Horace Holly, a Cambridge academic, is reluctantly drawn into plans for a voyage in search of this legendary queen. With his adopted son, Leo, he sets out on a brave journey, following a trail of clues. Shipwrecked and captured by cannibals, their voyage soon turns into a nightmare. This masterpiece of suspense and adventure, by the author of *King Solomon's Mines*, contains some of the most sensual, gently erotic passages in 19th-century literature.



Bill Homewood is well known for his appearances in numerous television shows and leading roles in the West End and for the Royal Shakespeare Company. His other recordings for Naxos AudioBooks include *Les Misérables*, *King Solomon's Mines* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

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