

A MODERN JUDAS.

OR, THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW IT WAS DONE.

Three days after that terrible night, five men were seated in the study of Dr. Japix, talking over the series of strange events which began with the death of Sebastian Melstane by poison, and ended with the death of Florry Marson by fire. These five men were:

Dr. Jacob Japix, M. D.; Mr. Octavius Fanks, detective; Roger Axton, Esq., gentleman; Jackson Spolger, Esq., manufacturer; M. Jules Guinaud, chemist's assistant.

It was about midday; the world outside was white with snow, the sky was heavy with somber clouds, and these five men, actors in the drama known as the Jarlochester Mystery, had met together in order to explain their several shares in the same.

Octavius Fanks had described the manner in which he had first become involved in the affair, the methods by which he had traced the crime, and the reasons he had had for his several suspicions.

At the conclusion of the detective's speech Roger Axton took up the thread of the story, supplying by oral testimony all the points of which Fanks was ignorant. Having finished his story, M. Judas arose to his feet and revealed all he knew about the case.

'But first, my friends,' he said, with venomous malignity, 'I give to Monsieur Fanks the congratulations on his talent for foolish fancies. Eh! yes, he is a grand detective, this young man, who thinks all have committed the murder but the real one. Conceive to yourselves, messieurs, the blindness of this monsieur—'

'I admit all your abuse,' interrupted Fanks, curtly; 'go on with what you have to tell.'

'Eh! I enrage this monsieur, me,' said Judas, with an insolent laugh. 'Bah! I mock myself of his anger. Behold, messieurs, I tell you the little tale of all things. Me, I loved this angel that now is dead; but she her heart gave to the dear Melstane. She returned from the Ile de Vite and tells Melstane that her father is poor, and she is to marry this amiable Spolger. My friend Melstane is enraged, and says: "I go to your father to tell him I wish you for mine." But the dear angel is afraid of the hard poverty. She weeps, she entreats, she implores the cruel Melstane to release her, but he refuses with scorn. Myself I heard it all. She speaks to me as her friend. I paint her the picture of starving, I make her to shrink with fear. Conceive, I implore you, messieurs, how this beautiful one, reared in money, dreads the coldness of the poor. She says: "He must not drag me to poorness! I am afraid of myself if he does. I am like my mother." Then, messieurs, I hear from her sweet lips that madame, her dear mother, was mad. The poor angel is afraid she will be mad some day also. Nevertheless, I love her; I wish her for mine. I am the friend of Melstane; but him I love not, because of this dear one. I say: "My friend Melstane will pull you to the cold, to the street, to the want of bread. Defend yourself, my beautiful. Kill him!"

'Oh! cried Roger, in a tone of horror: 'you put the idea into her head?'

'Eh! I say she was mad like madame, her mother. I told her of the starvation; oh, but yes, certainly, I did say to her: "Mademoiselle, if he lives, you will be taken to poorness. Kill him!" What would you, messieurs? I but say to her what myself I would do if in the same way. My suggestion with fear she received, and went weeping away. But again she sees the dear Melstane, and he tells her he will speak to her father. She implores, she kneels, but he is hard stone. I wish to have all the place to myself, so as to love this angel, and to Melstane I say: "Go thou, my friend, to some town and tell the angel to follow thee. Then you can demand of monsieur the father what you will." He is enchanted, this dear Melstane, and to me speaks with pleasure: "Eh, but the idea is too beautiful! This I will do; and if the father has any of the money, thou, my friend, will be to me as a brother." When next he meets the dear child, he tells her of the plan. It is that he is to depart to Jarloesterre, and there when writes he, she is to come. She says this she will do, but I, messieurs, eh! I smile to myself. In her heart she hates where once she loved. She has fear of the poorness. She says: "I will myself kill this cruel one, and no one will know of him dying." Behold, then, on the night before goes the dear Melstane, she comes to the pension. Myself I see her; I wait at the window and behold. She demands from my Sebastian what he has not, and to obtain it he goes from the room. Then in the box of pills on the table she places something. What I know

not then, but now I am aware, it is the pills of morphia!

'Which you gave her, I suppose?' said Fanks, disgusted with the callous manner in which the scoundrel spoke.

'Monsieur is wrong. The truth of the great God I now tell, and I know not where she obtained the death-pills.'

'I can explain that,' interrupted Spolger, quickly.

'Eh, truly, you were more of the evil to the dear angel than myself. Well, messieurs, I repeat my story. The dear Melstane departs for Jarloesterre, and I am free to love the angel; but I speak to her not. I see her not, I wait for the time to speak. One says she is to be the bride of the rich Spolger. Eh, I laugh, but nothing I say to any one. Then by the mistake of the office of post I do receive the letters sent by this Monsieur Axton to Mees Varlins. I at first refuse, but when I behold I see the mark of Jarloesterre and open the letters. I then this I discover.'

He threw a folded paper which he was holding in his hand on the table, and Fanks, opening it quickly, gave a cry of surprise.

'A marriage certificate!'

It certainly was, stating that a marriage had taken place in October between Sebastian Melstane, bachelor, and Florence Marson, spinster, at a registry-office in London.

'Yes!' said Judas, complacently, 'it is that the dear angel was married to my friend Melstane. Conceive, then, messieurs, why she killed him with the poison. He had the right to take her to the poorness. She was afraid because of my speech, and as no hope of help beheld she, this foolish one goes to the extremes and kills the man who holds her. Eh, messieurs, when this I see, I know I do hold the angel in my power. Then, clever Monsieur Fanks arrives and tells me of the death. He speaks of the pills, and as in a moment behold I that Mees Marson has poisoned the husband she feared. I admire; eh, truly, it was a great thing for a woman thus to behave. Then to myself I spoke. "Jules Guinaud, with this you hold, it is for you to be the husband of the widow Melstane."

'For Heaven's sake, don't call her that name!' said Roger, with a shudder.

'Wherefore not, monsieur? She was of a certainty the widow Melstane, and her husband she killed. I go then to Monsieur Marson; I show the certificate of marriage; I tell him of the death. To him I speak: "If I marry not your daughter, I betray all to the law." He shudders with the fear, and says: "You will be my son-in-law." Then comes Mees Judith, who knows of my love; but her I quickly crush. Eh, it was very well; but she played the traitor to me, so to her I also was cruel. I tell this dear Monsieur Fanks that she is the criminal, and show him the handkerchief of her which was let to fall by the dear angel. We go to the house of Monsieur Marson, and then the angel is distraught; she is mad, and tells all. Behold, messieurs, my story is at an end, and nothing I can say more. I played for a large thing. I have lost. It is cruel, but who can fight the angry gods? Everything have failed in. All are innocent but the angel, and she is dead. But I have held her in my arms. Yes, though the flames did burn, she was to me for a moment, so I am satisfied. Behold, then, all is at an end, and Jules Guinaud to you, messieurs, says "Adieu."

M. Judas resumed his seat in a conscious manner, as if he expected a round of applause for his very dramatic delivery of his villainous narrative. If he did expect praise he was disappointed, for a chorus of execration burst from the four men who had listened so patiently to this infamous history.

'You scoundrel!'

'Fiend!'

'Wretch!'

'Blackguard!'

Judas was not at all dismayed, but shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

'Eh, messieurs les Tartuffes, I make you the compliments. If you had been as me, acted the same you would have, I think. But all I have told, and now will the dear Spolger tell us of the pills which he gave to the angel?'

'I did not give her pills, you wicked wretch!' said Spolger, vehemently. 'I was as much in the dark as you about the cause of Melstane's death. The whole affair has been a great blow to me. I do not know when my nerves will recover.'

'Will you tell us your story, Mr. Spolger?' said Fanks, politely.

'Certainly; if only to disabuse your mind of the suspicions put into it by that infernal scoundrel there.'

The Frenchman, at whom this compliment was pointed, threw an ugly look at the millionaire which foreboded anything but good to that gentleman's well-being, but with his accustomed presence of mind soon recovered himself with an enigmatic smile.

'My faith, this "dear Spolger" is a tragedy of one act. Is it not so?'

'No, it isn't,' retorted Mr. Spolger, tartly; 'and now, as you've given your version of the story, perhaps you'll permit me to tell mine to these gentlemen, and clear myself from your vile insinuations.'

Judas nodded his head with a mocking smile, and Mr. Spolger, after glancing at him viciously, immediately explained himself.

'The whole affair is this,' he said, in his peevish voice. 'Miss Marson was put up at my house before Melstane went to Jarlochester, and displayed considerable curiosity about the manufacture of the "Spolger Soother," which you no doubt know is a pill meant to soothe the nerves and give a good night's rest. I was willing to show Miss Varlins all the attention possible, and therefore made up some pills for her with my own hands, to show her how it was done. As there is no morphia in the pills, I weighed out the requisite quantity with great care, upon which she asked me if I made a mistake and put in too much, what would be the result. I told her that in such a case the person would probably die. Upon which she made a remark which struck me as curious then, but which does not strike me as curious now. She said: "If, then, you make one pill with too much morphia in it the person taking it would die, and even if the rest of the pills were examined, no reason could be given for his death." I assured her that this would probably be the case, but said that all our "Soothers" were manufactured in a most careful manner. After this she manifested no further interest in the pills being made, so I sealed up the jar of morphia and placed it on the shelf. Shortly afterward I was called out of the room, and was absent for about a quarter of an hour; so I've no doubt that in my absence the unhappy girl took some morphia out of the bottle—if you remember, Mr. Fanks, the seal was broken—and carrying it home with her, made the two fatal pills according to the method I had shown her. These pills afterward—according to the story of Monsieur Judas—placed in the box of tonic pills left by Melstane on the table. Down at Jarlochester he took one, and died; the other, I understand from Mr. Fanks, was analyzed by Doctor Japix, and found to contain a great deal of morphia. I am afraid, therefore, that in all innocence I contributed to the catastrophe of Melstane's death. I beg to state, however, that there is this difference between myself and Monsieur Guinaud. He put the idea willingly into her head to kill Melstane. I showed her how, but inadvertently; so I am confident, gentlemen, that you will admit that no blame attaches to me in the affair.'

'Of course not,' said Japix, emphatically, when Spolger had finished; 'what you did, you did in all innocence. For my part, I look upon Monsieur Judas as culpable.'

'Eh, truly,' said Judas with a sneer, 'and for why, monsieur? I did not kill the dear Melstane.'

'No; but you put the idea of killing him into Miss Marson's head!'

'That is not guilt, monsieur.'

'Not legally, certainly, but morally!'

'Name of names! I care not for your morals, me! The law can not touch me, so I laugh at your reproach.'

'Nevertheless, Monsieur Judas,' said Fanks, meaningly, 'I would recommend you to leave Ironfields as soon as possible!'

'And for why? No one knows of this affair. Is it not so?'

'Of course! But though your character is not known to the world, it is to me. I am the law, and the law shall force you to leave this place. A man like you is dangerous, so you had better go back to your Paris, where you will find a few congenial scoundrels like yourself!'

'Eh, monsieur! I have no wish to stay in this rain climate,' said Judas, scoffingly; 'but if I chose to stay I would, certainly!'

'Try,' said Fanks, significantly.

But M. Judas had no wish to try. He simply shrugged his shoulders, and intimated that if they had learned all they desired from him, he was anxious to depart. Roger, however, asked him to resume his seat.

'I think it is only just to state the part taken by Miss Varlins in this lamentable affair,' he said, quietly. 'She had no idea that Miss Marson had anything to do with the death of Melstane for a long time. She asked me to obtain the letters from Melstane, thinking that he might use them to create a scandal, but she did not know that the certificate of marriage was among them. When, however, Miss Marson was ill, she betrayed the fact of the marriage and the existence of a certificate in her delirium. Miss Varlins was anxious to keep the fact of the marriage quiet, as, seeing Melstane was now dead, the whole affair might blow over. This was the reason she refused to

let Mr. Fanks see the letters without first looking through them, as she thought he might discover the marriage certificate and connect Miss Marson indirectly with the death of her miserable husband. Of the horrible truth, however, she had no idea till later on, when Miss Marson, in her sick-bed ravings, betrayed the whole affair. She then acted in a manner befitting her noble nature. The dead girl, gentlemen, was left Miss Varlins as a sacred charge by the late Mrs. Marson, and Miss Varlins proved herself worthy of the trust. She resolved to stand between guilty woman and the law, even at the cost of ignominy and disgrace to herself. I implored her to tell me the truth, never for a moment deeming her guilty. She refused to answer my questions, she refused to either deny or affirm the accusation, and it was then I guessed she was shielding some one; but I never thought it was Florry Marson; I thought it was her father. Now, gentlemen, the mystery is cleared up—the riddle is guessed. Florry Marson murdered the unhappy man who died at Jarlochester; but had it not been for the accident of her escaping from her sick-room and revealing her guilt in her delirium, Miss Varlins would have had to bear the stigma of this crime. A noble woman, gentlemen, you must all of you confess.'

'Noble indeed,' assented all present, except Judas, who laughed quietly to himself.

'In a few months,' resumed Roger, his voice trembling, 'I hope to lead her to the altar as my wife, and I pray to God that the brightness of the future will make amends for the sorrows of the past, and that I may prove worthy of this pearl of womanhood which I hope soon to have in my keeping.'

'Amen!' said Japix, in his deep voice. 'And now one word more. Florry Marson is dead, so of her let us speak kindly. It is true she killed Melstane; but, gentlemen, she was guiltless of the crime in one sense. Her mother, a shallow, frivolous woman, was insane with a suicidal mania, and several times tried to destroy herself. She died, mad—raving mad, and the insanity in her blood descended to her unhappy daughter. Hence the reason of Miss Varlins' great care and watchfulness. She was aware that the seeds of a homicidal mania were in the blood of the happy, laughing girl, and might develop when least expected. They developed, gentlemen, when she received a shock from the conduct of Melstane. He had thought her rich; then he found she was poor, and instead of making the best of it, as any honorable man would have done, he threatened her until her delicately poised brain went off the balance. Even then, however, she might have been saved from the crime, had she been left alone. But the idea of murder was placed in her head by the respectable Guinaud, and once there, it soon took shape. With the usual cunning of mad people, she resolved to commit the crime with as little danger to herself as possible. No idea of how to do it, however, occurred to her mind until her unfortunate conversation with Mr. Spolger, in which he showed her the way.'

'In all innocence,' interrupted Spolger, hastily.

'Of course, in all innocence,' replied Japix, gravely. 'Once having the idea of how to do it in her head, she put it into execution. She made the pills and watched her opportunity to place them in the box unknown to Melstane. How she managed it you know from the story of Monsieur Judas; but I am certain that if Melstane had shown her a little kindness, a little forbearance, she would have relented at the last moment. She was not altogether mad; she hardly knew what she was doing, and it was only when she heard suddenly of Melstane's death that the full enormity of her crime struck her. What was the result, gentlemen? It sent her mad—raving mad. She died, as we know, terribly, but even such a death was a blessing in disguise, for she would never have recovered her reason, and would have died in a mad-house.'

Every one present having thus given his evidence, Fanks summarized the whole affair in a few short-hand notes in his secretive little pocket-book:

'When Florry Marson married Sebastian Melstane, she was sane. The seeds of insanity were in her blood, but had not developed.'

'Owing to the brutal treatment of her husband and the suggestions of Judas, the hereditary disease became manifested in her in the form of a homicidal mania.'

'The conversation with Jackson Spolger showed her a method by which she could kill her now hated husband at small risk to herself.'

'She took advantage of it, made the pills with morphia stolen from Spolger's bottle, and placed the pills in the box during a visit to Binter's boarding-house.'

'Melstane went down to Jarlochester to await her arrival, and took the pill in all innocence. The sudden news of his death upset the balance of her brain and sent her mad.'

'From such madness she could never have recovered, so it was most merciful that she died.'

The Jarlochester mystery thus having been solved, Fanks replaced his note-book in his pocket, and the company prepared to break up. The first to go was M. Judas, who stood at the door, hat in hand, smiling blandly on the four Englishmen.

'Messieurs,' said Judas, in his most suave voice, 'I make you my best compliments on your brains. You have been all in the dark. I, Jules Guinaud, showed you the light, and with brutal behavior you have spoken to me. The dear angel is dead, my friend Melstane is dead, so now I leave this foggy climate of yours for my dear France. You have not the politeness, you English! You are all coarse of the style of your bistecak. Bah! I mock myself of you! But I say no more. Adieu, messieurs, adieu! The politeness of the accomplished French survives the brutality of the bull-dog English! Adieu! and for a good-bye English: Damn you all, messieurs!'

And the accomplished Judas, beaten on every point, flut polite to the end, vanished from the room, and later on from Ironfields itself.

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. FANKS FINISHES THE CASE.

'.... I had quite intended to duly label this note-book, and put it away among my papers, but somehow I forgot to do so, and only came across it by accident. I have been reading the Jarlochester Mystery over again, and it struck me as one of the most extraordinary cases I have ever had the pleasure of investigating. It is now about a year ago since I left Ironfields after bringing Judas to book, and I am rather pleased at discovering this pocket-book now, as it gives me an opportunity of completing the case by telling his fate....'

'.... In the "Figaro" of last Monday I read an account of a certain Jules Guinaud, who is none other than my old friend Monsieur Judas. It appears that after having left Ironfields, the accomplished Judas returned to Paris as offering a wider field for his peculiar talents, and there he married a very wealthy young lady. After the marriage, however, Monsieur Judas found out that his mother-in-law had the money, and it would not descend to the daughter until her death. On discovering this disagreeable state of things, Monsieur Judas proceeded to put his mother-in-law out of the way, and managed to do so by means of his old poison, morphia. Madame Judas inherited the money, monsieur had the handling of it, and all was going well, only monsieur found madame flirting with a good-looking cousin. Filled with virtuous indignation at the violation of the domestic hearth, Monsieur Judas proceeded to poison the cousin, but before she could manage it, madam, remembering the suspicious death of her mother, interfered, and the end of the affair was the recovery of the cousin, the cremation of the mother-in-law's body, and the arrest of Monsieur Judas....'

'.... He made a very ingenious defense, but the case was clearly proved against him, and he was sentenced to the guillotine. Monsieur Judas, however, it appears, had some influence in an underhand way, and got his sentence commuted to penal servitude; so now he is on his way to New Caledonia, where he will stay for the rest of his life in congenial company. It is reported that Madame Judas intends to get a divorce, in which case I presume she will marry the good-looking cousin....'

'.... Monsieur Judas thus being disposed of, I had better make a note of the present condition of the other actors in the mystery.'

'.... After Florry Marson's death her father fell into his dotage. Shortly afterward his firm became bankrupt; the second blow was too much for him, and he died six months ago....'

'.... Roger Axton is married to Judith Varlins, and I envy his noble wife. They have not much money, but all manage to live moderately well on Roger's income, in a pretty cottage at Hampstead. I dined there last Sunday, and Roger showed me the MS. of his new novel, which is so good that I predict a success. By who can tell if it will be a success? To public? No. The publishers? No. Not even the critics. At all events, Roger and his dear wife are very happy—so happy, indeed, that I think I must follow their example. But where will I find a wife like Judith?....'

'.... The last I heard of Mr. Spolger was that he had taken to his abode at Malvern to drink the water. He is still ill, and still trying new medicines. The Soother is selling very largely, as every one takes to—except the proprietor....'

'.... As to Japix, we I saw him only two weeks ago, and we had a little conversation over the Jarlochester affair. It arose out of a simple remark on mine....'

'One thing puzzles me, I said, in reference to the Jarlochester case, how such a shallow little piece of frivolity as Florry Marson could carry out her plans so cleverly.'

'The cunning of madness,' replied Japix, after a pause. 'I told you her mother was mad, and of course she broke out in her. Clever? I should think she was. Do you remember how cleverly she acted about