

A MODERN JUDAS.

OR, THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

CHAPTER XVI—Continued.

'Speak, speak! You must speak and deny this story.'

'I can not.'
'Judith!'
'I can not.'
'My God!' he said, in a hoarse whisper, 'is it true?'

'I can not answer you.'
Roger felt the room spin round him, and, reeling back, caught a chair for support, while he gazed with horror-filled eyes at the woman he loved, standing there so rigid and speechless.

'Judith, you do not mean what you say,' he cried, entreatingly, 'you can not understand. Judas says you murdered Melstane. He can prove it, he says, by the handkerchief. He has told Fanks, who is a detective. You are in danger. I can save you—Great Heaven! if you have any pity for me—if you have any pity for yourself, speak and give the lie to this foul accusation.'

'I can not, I tell you Roger, I can not!'
'You are innocent!'
'I can not say.'
'Are you guilty?'

'I can not say.'
Axton passed his hand over his brow in a bewildered fashion, hardly knowing if he were asleep or awake, then, with a sudden resolution of despair, flung himself on his knees at her feet.

'Judith! Judith! you must speak, you must. See me kneeling at your feet. I love you, I love you! I do not believe this vile story. In my eyes you are innocent. But the world—think of the world. It will deem you guilty if you can not defend yourself. Judas has you in his power. He is a merciless wretch. He hates you. He will drag you down to infamy and disgrace, unless you can clear yourself of this crime. Speak for your own sake—for mine. Do not let this devil triumph over you, for Heaven's sake. Deny his foul lies, and let him be punished as he deserves. Speak, for the love of God, speak!'

Judith said nothing, but the quick panting, of her breath, the nervous tremor agitating her frame, and the rapid opening and shutting of her hands showed how she was moved.

'She says nothing,' said Axton to himself as he arose slowly to his feet; 'she is silent. I can do nothing. You are innocent, I'll swear; but I can not prove it. No one can prove it but yourself, and you say nothing, Judith, listen! You are in deadly peril. Fanks is coming up to-night with Judas and they will accuse you of this crime!'

'To-night?'

'Yes; they have written to Mr. Marson. They will produce the handkerchief. They will tell the story. You refuse to answer me; you must answer them. Fanks told me of this to-day, and I came up at once to warn you.'

'It is useless. I can say nothing.'
'You must say something. It is a question of life and death. The affair is in the hands of the law. Nothing can save you but your own denial. You must prove the falseness of this horrible story. It means disgrace. It means prison! It means death!'

She looked up suddenly as he spoke those last words, and crossing over to him, laid her hand on his shoulder, speaking wildly, and with uncontrollable agitation.

'I know what it means. You need not tell me that. I know it means the smirching of my fair fame as a woman, I know that it condemns me to an ignominious death; but I can say nothing. I can not say I am innocent; I dare not say I am guilty. I must be silent. I must be dumb. Let them say what they like; let them do what they like; my honor and my life rests in the hands of God, and He alone can save me.'

'But you are innocent!'

She burst into tears.

'Oh, why do you torture me like this? I tell you I can say nothing; not even to you. My lips are sealed. Let them come up to-night; let them accuse me; let them drag me to prison. I can say nothing. For days, for nights I dreaded this; now it has come at last. You believe me innocent, my true-hearted lover, but the world will believe me guilty. Let them do so. God knows my sufferings. God knows my anguish, and in His hands I leave myself for good or ill.'

He heard with bowed head, and at the end of her speech he felt a soft kiss on his hair. When he looked up the room was empty.

'Judith!'

There was no reply, and the only sound he heard was the distant slamming of a door that seemed to his agonized imagination to separate him from the woman he loved—rever-

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GUESSING OF THE RIDDLE.

Francis Marson was considerably perplexed at receiving a note from Fanks, asking for an interview. He guessed at once that Judas had broken faith and unbosomed himself to the detective, but what puzzled him was the reason the Frenchman had for such betrayal. In order to secure the success of his schemes, it was necessary that he should keep silent, yet he had evidently voluntarily revealed his secret knowledge, and thus rendered it useless to himself and his designs. The only way in which Marson could account for the detective's request was that he must have learned the secret of Judas, otherwise there would be no reason why he should seek an interview.

Filled with this idea, Marson summoned up all his courage, and prepared to meet the coming storm with as brave a front as possible. He wrote to Fanks, and told him he would be prepared to see him at eight o'clock that night; then he shut himself up in his study for the rest of the day. Plunged in gloomy reflections, he saw no one, not even Judith; but as the hour approached when he expected his visitor to arrive he was unable to bear his trial in solitude any longer; so, sending for Judith, he told her about the interview. To his surprise, she received the communication with great equanimity, and being in ignorance of her forewarning by Roger, he could not but admire the undaunted spirit with which she was prepared to face the terrible trouble coming to them both.

On her side, Judith saw plainly that Marson was almost distracted by nervous terror and dread of the impending evil, so she did not think it was wise to reveal to him the dangerous position in which she was placed. He would learn it in due time; but, meanwhile, she preserved a gloomy silence, and told her adopted father that she would be by his side during the ordeal, in order to support him to the best of her ability. Poor soul, she knew how futile that would be, but with stern self-repression kept her forebodings locked in her own heart, and Francis Marson felt to a great extent comforted in knowing that he had at least one friend to stand by him in the hour of peril.

It was nearly eight o'clock when Judith entered the study, and found Marson seated at his writing-table, with his gray head buried in his arms. A spasm of agony distorted the calm of her face as she saw the abject terror of the old man; however, repressing all signs of emotion, she moved slowly across the room, and touched him on the shoulder. He looked up with a startled cry, but was somewhat reassured by the peacefulness of her expression. No marble statue in its eternal calm looked so void of passion and human fear as this tall, pale woman who masked the anguish of her aching heart under an impassive demeanor. Every emotion, every pang, every torture was expressed on the withered countenance of the old man; but she was cold, expressionless, still, as if all human feeling had been frozen in her soul.

Their eyes met for a moment, and from the dim eyes of the man, from the splendid eyes of the woman, there leaped forth a sudden look of mutual dread, of mutual anguish, and horrible suspense. That look spoke all, and they had no need of words to explain their feelings, so Judith sat down by the fire, and Marson resumed his chair at the desk in ominous silence.

At last Marson spoke low and timidly, as if he feared his words would be trumpeted forth to the four quarters of the world.

'Is Florry better?'

'No, I think she is worse to-night. Very excitable and restless.'

'Oh, Judith! Was it wise of you to leave her?'

'She is in good hands. Doctor Japix is with her.'

'Japix!' repeated the old man, starting. 'I'm sorry about that. On this night of all nights I wish no one in the house!'

'It doesn't matter,' replied Judith, feigning an indifference she was far from feeling; 'what we know to-night all the world will know to-morrow.'

'Good heavens, I hope not!'

'We can expect nothing else from such a man as Judas.'

'You mean Guinaud.'

'I mean Judas! The name suits such a traitor.'

'But why should he act as he is doing?'

'I don't know.'

'It is against his own interest.'

'Heaven only knows what he considers to be his interests,' said Judith, bitterly, 'but anything is better than he should marry Florry!'

'Do you think he would consent to take money instead?'

'I think it's too late to offer any terms. Remember, to-night we deal with the law.'

'But Fanks is a friend of Roger Axton.' Judith shuddered, and covered her face with her hands.

'Yes, I know he is,' she said, in a low voice; 'but Roger can do nothing to help us.'

'Are you sure?'

'Quite sure. He told me so this afternoon.'

'You saw him?'

'I did!'

Marson was about to speak, but the somber expression of her face forbade him to ask further questions, and he remained silent.

The minutes seemed to fly by on wings of lightning to this unhappy man and woman, who waited with shuddering dread for the approach of that horror from which they could not escape.

A knock at the door, then Marks flung it wide open, announcing three visitors.

'Mr. Fanks, Mr. Axton, Monsieur Guinaud.'

'Roger,' said Judith to herself, with a sudden pang at her heart, as the servant retired. 'Oh, the humiliation!'

Marson greeted his three visitors with a grave bow, and they all sat down in silence. There was a sullen look on the face of Judas, for he felt that he had been undiplomatic in his dealings with the detective, and that all his well-laid schemes would come to naught now that his secret was made known.

On the other hand, Fanks appeared serenely confident that things were going as he wished them, but an uneasy expression on his face as he glanced furtively at Judith, showed that he was by no means pleased with the unexpected discovery he had made. Roger said nothing, but sat looking at the carpet with downcast eyes, the very picture of misery and despair.

'You wish to see me, I understand from your letter, sir,' said Marson to the detective, in a dull, hopeless voice.

'Yes; with regard to the death of Sebastian Melstane.'

'I know nothing about his death.'

'Nothing?' repeated Fanks, with great emphasis.

Mr. Marson flushed all over his worn face, and he glanced rapidly at Judith, then repeated his former denial with great deliberation.

'I know nothing about his death.'

'Do you know anything, Miss Varlins?'

'I? How should I know?'

'I'm sorry to speak rudely to a lady,' said Fanks, suavely, 'but this equivocation.'

She looked despairingly at him with the expression of a trapped animal in her eyes, a mute appeal for mercy, but the detective steeled his heart against her, and spoke plainly:

'Do you remember a visit you paid the late Mr. Melstane at Binter's boarding-house during the early part of the month of November?'

'No, I do not.'

'Do you recognize this handkerchief?'

'No. It is a lady's white handkerchief. How should I recognize it?'

'By the name in the corner.'

She glanced rapidly at the embroidery, and seeing the fatal name 'Judith,' let her head fall on her breast with a gesture of despair.

'Do you recognize the handkerchief now?'

asked Fanks, with a merciless deliberation.

'Yes! It is mine!'

'Do you know where it was found?'

'No.'

'It was found in the sitting-room of Mr. Melstane by this gentleman,' said Octavius, pointing to Judas.

She raised her eyes, and her glance followed the direction of the outstretched finger. Hate, contempt, dread, and defiance were all expressed in that rapid look, and Judas shrunk back with a feeble smile from the scathing scorn in her eyes.

'This being the case, Miss Varlins,' resumed Fanks, coolly, 'it is useless for you to deny that you were at Binter's boarding-house on the night in question.'

'I do deny it!' she said, resolutely. 'I was not at Binter's any night during November; I never saw Mr. Melstane during November. I know nothing about his death!'

Octavius laid the handkerchief on the table with a resolute expression.

'I see I must refresh your memory, Miss Varlins,' he said, coolly. 'Sebastian Melstane died at Jarchester on the 13th of November by taking, in all innocence, a morphia pill, which was placed among certain tonic pills he was in the habit of taking. When I find the person who placed the two morphia pills in the box I find the murderer of Sebastian Melstane. Monsieur Guinaud will now resume the story.'

M. Judas bowed his head gracefully, and spoke slowly in his vile English.

'At the nights before my friend Melstane go to Jarchester one dame find him chez lui. I at the vinda stay and overt mess yeux. Mon ami, ce cher Sebastian does go from ze appartement an' zen behold moi ze dame plaze dans un boite a pilules quelque chose, je ne sais quoi.'

'Speak English, if you please,' said Fanks sharply.

'Eh, ce'st difficile, mais oui. She puts in ze boxes somezing, I knows no wat; zen moi cher ami come again an' ze leave par la fenetre. I do look after zam, an' see ze mouchoir now wis Monsieur Fanks. Dat is all I speak. La Voila.'

Roger, who had hitherto kept silent during the whole of this scene, so terrible in its intensity, now sprung to his feet with a cry of rage.

'It's a lie—a lie!' he said, savagely. 'Fanks! Marson! you surely don't believe this man—this vile wretch who would sell his soul for money? He killed Melstane himself—I am sure of it!—and tells this lie to ruin an innocent woman and to save his own worthless life. Look at him; all of you! The spy—the traitor—the defamer—the prisoner!'

Judas was standing by his chair, breathing heavily, with his face a ghastly white, and his eyes narrowed to their most dangerous expression. So vile, so craven, so treacherous he looked, that all present involuntarily shrunk from him with loathing.

'Monsieur!' he said, in his sibilant voice, speaking rapidly in his own tongue, to which he always reverted when excited, 'you are a liar and a fool! I did not kill my friend. Bah! I mock myself of that accusation. Think you that I would be her, if I was what you say? What I speak is the truth of the great God! What I declare, I saw! My friend died by the devil-thought of a woman. And that woman is there!'

He pointed straight at Judith with a long, lean, cruel hand, and the eyes of all, leaving his tall, slim figure, rested on Judith Varlins. She stood still, and mute as if she were turned to a statue of stone, and for the space of a minute not a movement was made by any of the actors in this strange drama.

'What do you say to this accusation, Miss Varlins?' asked Fanks, in a tone of deep pity.

'I say nothing.'

The words dropped slowly from her white lips, and then the overstrained nerves of the woman gave way, and with a low moan of acute anguish, she sunk down in a faint on the floor. Roger sprang forward and raised her in his arms, but Judas, with a mocking, sardonic laugh, tossed his long arms in the air, and burst out into a jeering speech.

'Yes, yes! Take her in your arms! Lift her from the ground, but you can not lift her again to her purity of a woman. She is lost, the woman you loved. In her place you find the murderess. Ah! it is a good play!'

This cowardly triumphing was too much even for the phlegmatic Fanks, and with a suppressed oath he strode up to the gibing villain.

'If you say another word, you despicable blackguard, I will kill you!'

The Frenchman turned on him with the snarling ferocity of a tiger.

'Eh, you will kill me, my brave! Is it that I am a child you can rage me with your big words? Miserable English that you are, I spit upon you! I, Jules Guinaud, laugh at your largeness. Eh! I believe well. You are afraid of what I say, but I keep not the silence, holy blue! Bah! your sweet English lady, she is a criminal!'

'You lie!' shouted Roger, madly, starting to his feet. 'You lie, you wretch! Marson! Fanks! Get me some water! She has fainted. And as for you, scoundrel—'

He advanced toward Judas with clenched fists, whereupon the Frenchman, with a look of fear on his gray face, recoiled against the wall. But not even the threatening attitude of the young man could restrain the gibing devil that possessed this villain, and with a shrill scream of laughter he went on with his insults.

'For me the box, monsieur. But certainly, you are wise—you are very wise. Come, now, if you are bold—I hide not the truth. I declare—if your angel is not the one who killed the dear Melstane, say, who is it? Declare the name.'

Roger, with glittering eyes, and a fierce look on his face, would have sprung on Judas and caught him by the throat, when the answer to the question came from a most unexpected quarter.

Outside the room there was a shrill scream, the heavy tramping of feet, and a woman in her night-gown dashed madly in to their midst.

It was Florry Marson!

In her eyes shone the fever of insanity, on her dry lips a fearful laugh of horrible laughter, and she whirled round and round in the middle of the room like a Menad, while Japix, who had followed her, tried vainly to approach.

'God! How like her mother!'

The cry of horror came from the lips of Marson, who was holding a glass of water to the lips of Judith; but his daughter did not hear him. With a shriek she stopped her insensate whirling, and dashed forward with distorted features to M. Judas.

'Hold her! hold her!' cried Japix; 'she is mad—raving.'

Judas was too terrified to do anything, and stood nerveless and paralyzed, facing

this ghastly spectre with the loose hair, the frantic gestures, and blazing eyes.

'What have you done with him?' shrieked Florry, making futile clutches at Judas, 'you fiend! you reptile! Why did I not kill you instead of Sebastian?'

A cry of horror burst from the lips of the listeners.

'Give him to me! give him to me!' howled the mad woman, 'you know I killed him! I did not mean it! I did not mean it! The devil told me about the morphia. Hist! I will tell you! His name is Spolger. He lives in the big house on the hill. He has poison. Oh, yes, yes! I know. I stole it to give Sebastian—poor Sebastian!'

'Gentleman,' cried Marson, piteously, 'do not believe her. This is raving.'

'I believe it's the truth,' said Fanks, solemnly.

Japix advanced toward Florry, but she saw him coming, and with a shriek of anger, darted toward the study-table, upon which she sprang with the activity of an antelope. Her foot touched the lamp, it fell over, and in a moment the fierce flame had caught her light draperies, and she stood before the horrified spectators a pillar of flame.

'I burn! I burn!' she screamed. 'Sebastian, help! help! it is my punishment! It is—God! God! save me—save me!'

Roger tore down one of the curtains and ran to her assistance, but she bounded off the table, and running to Judas, flung her arms round his neck. With a yell of terror he tried to fling her off, but she only clung the closer, and the flames caught his clothes.

'Save me, Sebastian; I did not mean to kill you. Ah, ah!'

'Mon Dieu, help me!'

Both Fanks and Roger flung themselves on the writhing pair, who were now rolling on the floor, and they managed to extinguish the flames. Florry was terribly burned, and the Frenchman had fainted. Old Marson on his knees was praying feebly, and Judith, recovering from her stupor, rose slowly up.

'What is the matter?'

The answer came in a wailing voice from the broken-hearted father:

'The judgment of God! The judgment of God!'

EXTRACTS FROM A DETECTIVE'S NOTE-BOOK.

... I am utterly dumfounded ... Judith is innocent ... She is a noble woman, and Florry, the martyr, who loved Melstane so, is his murderess ... The little serpent ... But let me speak as kindly of her as I can ... She is dead ... A terrible death ... Well might her old father say it was the judgment of God ... The sight was terrible ... I shall never be able to get it out of my thoughts ... Strange how the discovery was made ... And that noble Judith Varlins was going to bear the burden of her adopted sister's sin ... What a woman ... If I envy Roger anything, I envy him the splendid heroine he is going to make his wife ... I take back with shame and regret all that I have said against her in this book ... She is a noble woman, and Florry—well, she is dead, so I will say nothing! 'De mortuis,' etc.

'Mem.—To ask Japix, Roger, Spolger and Judas to meet me at some place in order to learn precisely how the crime was committed ... I should have been spared all this wrongful suspicion of innocent people if Judas had told me the truth ... He knew all along who committed the crime, and was trading on the knowledge for his own ends ... I should have thought that even he would have hesitated before marrying a murderess ... but it was her money he wanted ... No doubt he laughs at the way I have blundered—well, I deserve it ... I have acted very wrongly in a great many ways; but I would defy any one but a detective in a 'novel' to have unraveled this strange case ... The mystery was revealed by no mortal, but by God ...'

'Under these circumstances I can afford to bear the gibes of Monsieur Judas in silence ...'

(To be Continued.)

At a meeting of shareholders of the Ocean Marine Insurance Co. at Halifax on Tuesday it was decided to wind up affairs as soon as the amount at risks can be reinsured and outstanding losses settled. The capital of the company has been much impaired through recent losses, and affairs will pan out badly. There may be 20 cents on the dollar for the shareholders. The company had a capital of \$100,000, 50 per cent. paid up and has been in operation eight years, during which three or four dividends have been paid.

The annual convention of the Ontario branch of the Dominion Alliance for the suppression of the liquor traffic opened on Tuesday morning in Richmond Hall, Toronto. There was a large attendance of delegates. W. H. Holland, president, occupied the chair. A delegation from the Quebec branch of the Alliance was received and addresses were given by J. H. Carson and S. P. Leet regarding the progress of the work in the lower provinces. The report of the Executive Committee was read and various committees were appointed. An adjournment was made soon after 11 to enable the committee to prepare reports.