

A MODERN JUDAS.

OR, THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

CHAPTER XIV—Continued.

'Had,' said Roger, emphatically; 'no, have! I have suspicions of Judas, and I'm pretty sure—'

'That he committed the murder,' finished the doctor.

'Oh, I'm not prepared to go that far,' said Fanks, quickly; 'but as regards Monsieur Guinaud, I'll tell you one thing. It's the custom, I understand, for the master to check the assistant with regard to the number of pills in a box.'

'Yes; that is the usual custom.'

'Well, I understood from Judas that such was the case with Melstane's tonic pills. Having my suspicions, however, I went and saw Wosk myself.'

'And what did he say?'

'That he counted the pills in the box and handed it back to Judas—open.'

'Oh,' said Axton, suddenly, 'then you think it was Judas put the two extra pills in the box?'

'He might have done so.'

'But what would be his motive in getting rid of Melstane?'

'Ah, there's no difficulty in answering that,' replied Fanks, quickly. 'It appears Judas loves Miss Marson to distraction; Melstane stood in his way, so he might have got rid of him by the pill method.'

'Granted,' said Japix, eagerly; 'but even if he did remove Melstane by that morphia method, he would be no nearer the object of his love than before. A chemist's assistant is not a fitting match for the heiress of Francis Marson.'

'True, true!'

'Besides,' said Axton, taking up the defense, 'why should Judas take the trouble to kill Melstane at Jarchester when he could have done so at Ironfields?'

'Oh, that's merely a question of safety,' replied Octavius, thoughtfully. 'If Melstane had died here, awkward questions might have been asked, which would have been difficult for Guinaud to answer; but at Jarchester the man dies, and there is nothing to connect Judas or any one else with the death. That pill idea is a devilish ingenious one.'

'Quite worthy of a Frenchman!'

'Pooh! the virtuous English can easily hold their own in that respect; for every extraordinary case in Paris I can find you an equivalent in London.'

'By the way,' cried Japix, suddenly deserting the line of conversation in favor of a new one, 'I went to see Miss Marson today; she's very ill, you know.'

'My fault,' said Roger, regretfully, 'blurring out the fact of Melstane's death.'

'Well, go on,' said Fanks, impatiently;

'What were you going to say, Japix?'

'That I visited Miss Marson to-day.'

'You've said that. What else?'

'And I saw her father, who told me a very extraordinary thing.'

'Wait a bit,' said the detective, with great excitement. 'I'll bet you a fiver that I can tell you what he told you.'

'The duce you can!' replied Japix, in astonishment. 'Well, I'll take the bet Marson said?'

'That Judas had written him asking him for an interview.'

'Right! How the—no, I won't swear. But how, by all that's sacred, did you find that out?'

'And Judas also said that it was about some documents.'

'Right again! I believe you are a magician, Fanks.'

'Not at all—inductive reasoning.'

'I wish you'd stop talking riddles,' broke in Roger, irritably, 'and tell us what the duce you mean.'

'It won't be very pleasant—to your ears.'

'Go on. I know what you're going to say,' said Roger, excitedly, 'but don't mind me. I'm going to know the truth about this business.'

Japix looked at his two guests with astonishment depicted on his broad, good humored face, but judged it best to say nothing until Octavius explained matters, which he did speedily.

'My dear Japix,' he said, quietly, 'there was a packet of letters which Roger obtained from Melstane at Jarchester and forwarded to Miss Varlins, addressed to her by her first name.'

'Miss Judith?'

'Precisely. Well, that stupid old post-mistress muddled up the name with that of Judas, and sent the packet to him. We met Miss Varlins, and went together to get the packet from Guinaud. I asked her to let me see the packet. She refused at first, but ultimately consented on condition that I let her look over the letters first. I agreed to that, she did so, and I found nothing.'

'Well, well!' said Japix, quickly. 'I don't see anything strange in that.'

'Don't you? I do. If there had been nothing particular in that packet, Miss

Varlins would not have objected to my seeing it. So my belief is that Judas abstracted the letters he did not want me to see, and has gone to Marson to show them to him.'

'Well?'

'Well!' repeated Fanks, angrily, 'don't you see? Those letters, stolen by Judas, bear indirectly on the death of Melstane.'

'If that is the case, why should Judas show them to Marson?'

Fanks fidgeted uneasily in his chair, looked at the floor, the ceiling, the doctor, everywhere but at Roger.

'I really can't tell,' he said, at length, very lamely.

'Yes, you can,' shouted Roger, rising quickly; 'you suspect—'

'I have said no name,' replied Fanks, very pale, rising in his turn.

'No, but I will!'

'Roger!'

'I will tell you, and I declare it's a lie—a lie!'

'Good heavens!' cried Japix, rising, 'He looked at both men for an answer, and obtained it from Roger:'

'It means that my old school-fellow suspects the woman I love of a crime.'

'Judith Varlins?'

'Yes; Judith Varlins.'

Japix looked at Fanks to see if he would repeat the accusation, but the detective said nothing.

'My dear Axton, he said, you're dreaming,' he said soothingly. 'I'd as soon think of suspecting myself.'

Roger seized the large hand of the doctor and shook it heartily.

'Thank Heaven, there is some one believes her innocent!' he said, with a half sob.

'Tut, tut!' answered the doctor, quietly; 'sit down, my dear boy, sit down. There must be some explanation of this.'

'If Roger would not be so impetuous,' said Fanks, who had resumed his seat, 'I would like to tell him something.'

Roger looked at his friend with a gleam of hope in his eye, and sat down in sullen silence.

'You yourself say I suspect Miss Varlins,' explained Fanks, with faint hesitation, 'simply because said Judas had taken certain documents to Marson. How do you know that I may not suspect some one else?'

'Whom?'

'Miss Varlins,' observed Fanks, leisurely, 'may, for all we know, be acting a very noble part, and may be trying to screen another person—for instance, Mr. Francis Marson.'

'What?' shouted Japix and Roger, in one breath.

'I'm not certain—by no means certain; but I have my suspicions.'

'Of Marson?' said Japix, scornfully; 'pooh! nonsense! There isn't a more respected man in Ironfields.'

'It's generally your respected persons who fancy they can sin with impunity, and not be found out on account of that very respectability. May I ask you a few questions, Japix?'

'By all means.'

'Why did Marson want his pretty daughter to marry that ugly wreck of a Spolger?'

Japix hesitated a moment before answering.

'I know nothing for a fact,' he said, at length, with great reluctance, 'but common rumor—'

'Common rumor, by all means. There's no smoke without fire.'

'A detestable proverb,' said Japix, frowning. 'Well, rumor says that Marson will smash if money is not put into his business, and that Florry Marson was to be the price of Spolger finding for Marson & Son the requisite money.'

'I think that's the most powerful reason for the crime we've had yet.'

Neither of his listeners answered this remark, as they seemed instinctively to feel that the fatal net was closing round Marson through the relentless logic of the detective.

'In the case of Axton,' resumed Fanks, coolly, 'the motive for the crime appeared to be love. In the case of Spolger, love. In the case of Judas, love. All very well, but hardly a strong enough motive to make a man put a rope round his neck. In this case of Marson, however, what do we find? Bankruptcy, loss of position, loss of money, loss of name, in fact, loss of everything that a man holds dear. A strong motive, I think.'

'I can't stand this,' cried Roger, jumping up quickly; 'confound it, Fanks, you'd argue the man guilty without a chance of defense. You tell us the motive for the crime, certainly; but how did Marson do it? When did he have the pill-box? Where could he obtain the morphia?'

'Judas knows!'

'Judas!'

'Yes. I believe Judas is an accomplice

of Marson, and between the two of them they killed Melstane in that remarkably ingenious manner.'

'I can't believe it,' said Japix, as his two visitors arose to take their leave.

'Probably not,' replied Fanks, calmly; 'but I'll give you plenty of proof shortly.'

'Why, what do you intend to do?'

'I'm going to see Monsieur Judas.'

'You'll find him a match for you,' said the doctor, grimly, as he accompanied his guests to the door.

'Then I'll see Marson.'

'Humph! two stools, you'll fall to the ground.'

'I'll take my chance of that,' said Fanks, cheerfully, as he stepped out into the darkness with Roger. 'Good-night, Japix. I'll be able to give you the key to the Jarchester Mystery next week.'

EXTRACTS FROM A DETECTIVE'S NOTE-BOOK.

.... Just returned from an evening with Japix ... We (R—, J—, and myself) had a long conversation about the case ...

This conversation has left me in a state of great perplexity ... I told Japix I would give him the key to the mystery next week, but I spoke more boldly than I had reason to ... It is true I am narrowing down the circle ... I suspect two people, with a possible third ... Marson, Judith Varlins, and Judas ... It's a very humiliating fact to confess this indecision even to myself ...

But, detectives are not infallible save in novels ... I am perplexed ... I have suspected Axton wrongfully ... I have suspected Spolger wrongfully, and now ... Let me make a note of the motives of each of the three people I suspect now ...

.... Marson! He is on the verge of bankruptcy ... only one person can save him, viz., Jackson Spolger ... He, however, declines to help him unless he marries Florry Marson ... She won't marry Spolger because of her love for Melstane ... A strong motive here for Marson to get rid of Melstane ...

.... Miss Varlins ... Her motive for getting rid of Melstane, I think, is a mixture of love and jealousy ... Both strong motives, with a woman ...

.... Judas! He loves Miss Marson also, and with his loose morality would have no hesitation in putting Melstane out of the way. He wants Florry Marson, he wants her money ... Melstane stands in the way of his obtaining both ... in such a case Judas is just the man—from my reading of his character—to commit a crime ... Again, his employment as a chemist offers him peculiar advantages for obtaining morphia ... It would be difficult for either Marson or Miss Varlins to obtain morphia in a large quantity, but Judas could easily obtain it in the ordinary course of his business ... I am going to see Judas, and from a second conversation may perhaps learn something useful ... He is crafty ... still he may betray himself ... at all events, it is worth while trying.

'Mem.—To see Judas to-morrow night.'

CHAPTER XV.

MONSIEUR JUDAS AT BAY.

M. Jules Guinaud was not quite satisfied in his own mind with regard to the result of his interview of the previous night. It was true that by using the documents he had stolen from Melstane's packet he had succeeded in obtaining Marson's consent to his marriage with Florry, but it was also true that he had found an unexpected obstacle in his estimate of the female sex, regarding them as beings quite inferior to the male, but at the same time he was too clever a man to underestimate the result of a quick-witted woman opposing herself to his will. Florry was a mere cipher, whom he loved in a sensual fashion for her beauty, and in worldly fashion for her money, but Judith was quite a different stamp of woman to this negative type of inane loveliness. She had a masculine brain, she had a strong will, she had a fearless nature, and Guinaud dreaded the upshot of any interference on her part.

A genius, this man—a genius in a wicked way with wonderful capabilities of arranging his plans, and brushing aside any obstacle that might interfere with their fulfillment. In this case Judith interfered, so Judas, taking a rapid survey of the situation, saw a means by which he could silence her effectively, and determined to do so without delay. He wished to marry Florry Marson; he wished to enjoy the income, the position, and the benefits derived from being a son-in-law of Marson, and was consequently determined to let nothing stand in the way of the realization of his hopes. Judas was not a brave man, but he was wonderfully crafty, and the fox, as a rule, gains his ends where the lion fails; so the Frenchman determined to go up to the Hall on the night following his first interview, see Judith, and let her know what to expect if she meddled with his arrangements.

This was all very nicely arranged, and if M. Guinaud had been undisturbed, he would no doubt have succeeded in his wicked little plans; but fate, not approving of this usurpation of the role as arbitrator of human lives, interfered, and Octavius Fanks was the instrument she used to defeat all the Frenchman's schemes.

In playing with fate, that goddess has a

nasty habit of forcing her opponent's hand before he desires to show it, and this is what she did now, to the great discomfiture of M. Judas.

It was about eight o'clock on the night following that momentous interview at the Hall, and all Mrs. Binter's boarders had left the jail on the ticket-of-leave system except Judas, who sat in the drawing-room cell arranging everything in his crafty brain before setting out on his errand to Miss Varlins. The head jailer had several times entered the room and intimated that he had better run out for a breath of fresh air; but Judas, saying he would go later on, kept his seat by the diminutive fire, and declined to obey Mrs. Binter, much to that good lady's disgust.

'Why, drat the man,' she said, in her stony fashion, to one of the under-warders, 'what does he mean by wastin' coal an' ile? Why don't he walk his dinner off by usin' his legs instead of robbin' me of my profits by takin' it out of his thirty shillin' weekly?'

The under-warder suggested respectfully that M. Judas might be expecting a friend that night, as on a previous occasion, to which the jailer made prompt reply:

'Oh, I dare say! That friend he had here was a furriner. I heard 'em talkin' their French gabble. It's more like a turkey gobblin' than a man talkin'. Why don't these furriners learn English? There's the front door bell! P'raps it's that friend again. I'll go myself.'

And go herself she did, to find Mr. Fanks waiting on the doorstep; and thinking he was expected by Judas, seeing that gentleman had waited in, took him in charge, and formally conducted him to the drawing-room cell.

'A gentleman for you, munseer,' she said, glaring at her lodger, who had arisen to his feet in some surprise, 'an' please don't use too many coals, sir. For coals is coals, however much you may think 'em waste paper.'

Having thus relieved her feelings, Mrs. Binter retired to the basement, where she amused herself badgering Mr. Binter, and Fanks was left alone with the chemist's assistant.

'You wish to see me, monsieur?' asked Judas, in French, narrowing his eyes to their most cat-like expression.

'Yes,' replied Fanks, sitting down. 'I wish to ask you a few questions.'

'I can not give you long, Monsier Fanks,' said the Frenchman, unwillingly, 'I have an engagement for this night!'

'Oh, indeed. With Mr. Marson, or Miss Varlins?'

This was carrying the war into the enemy's camp with a vengeance, and for a moment Judas was so nonplussed that he did not know what to say.

'Monsieur is pleased to be amusing,' he said, at length, with an ugly smile. 'Monsieur does me the honor to make my business his own.'

'I'm glad you see my intentions so clearly, Monsieur Guinaud.'

They were painfully polite to each other, these two men, but this mutual politeness was of a dangerous kind foreboding a storm. Like two skillful fencers, they watched each other warily, each ready to take advantage of the first opportunity to break down the guard of the other. It was difficult to say who would win, for they were equally clever, equally watchful, equally merciless, and neither of them underestimated the acuteness of his adversary. A duel of brains, both men on guard, and Fanks made the first attack!

'Are you aware, Monsieur Guinaud, that you stand in a very dangerous position?'

'My faith, no! Not at all.'

'Then it is as well you should know at once. I am a detective, as you know, and am investigating this affair of your late friend. I suspect some one of the murder.'

'Very well. Monsieur Axton?'

'No.'

'The dear Spolger?'

'No.'

Judas shrugged his shoulders!

'My faith! I know not, then, the man you suspect.'

'Yes, you do. I suspect Monsieur Jules Guinaud.'

The Frenchman was by no means startled, but laughed jeeringly.

'Eh, monsieur! Que diable faites-vous dans cette galere?'

'You need not jest. I am in earnest!'

'Truly! Will monsieur speak plainly?'

'Certainly! You say you were a friend of Melstane. No, that is a lie. You hated him because he was your successful rival with Miss Marson. You wished him dead, so that you would be free to make your suite to the young lady. The box of tonic pills left your hands for those of Melstane.'

'Pardon! It went first into the hands of Monsieur Vosk.'

'Don't trouble to tell lies, Guinaud. I have asked Wosk, and he says he counted the pills, and then gave you the box again—open.'

'It's a lie!'

'Reserve your defense, if you please. When you got that box, you put in those

two morphia pills, and Melstane left Ironfields carrying his death in his pocket.'

'You have the invention, monsieur, I see.'

'In this scheme for Melstane's death you were prompted by your accomplice, Francis Marson.'

'Eh! It's an excellent play, without doubt.'

'You stole some compromising letters of Marson's from that packet of Melstane's, and took them up to him last night.'

'You are wisdom itself, monsieur.'

'Those letters form your hold over Marson, and you offered to destroy them on condition that he let you marry Miss Marson.'

'A miracle of logic! Eh, I believe well.'

'It is my firm conviction,' said Fanks losing his temper at the glittering tones of the Frenchman, 'that what I have stated is the truth, and that you and Marson are responsible for the death of Melstane in the way described.'

'Monsieur is not afraid of the law of libel, evidently.'

'No; there are no witnesses present.'

'Ah, you scheme well!'

'Pshaw! What answer can you make to my statement?'

M. Jules smiled blandly, shrugged his shoulders, and spread out his lean hands with a depreciating gesture.

'Me! Alas! I can say nothing but that you have as strong a case against me as you had against your dear friend, Monsieur Roger.'

Fanks reddened angrily. He was aware that he had blundered two or three times during the case, but still it was not pleasant to be taunted thus by a smiling adversary who indulged in fine irony.

'You led me to believe Axton was guilty,' he said, meekly.

'I? Eh, it is a mistake. I but told what I knew. It is not my fault if the affair reflects on Monsieur Roger.'

'Do you know I can arrest you on suspicion of murder?'

'Truly! Then do so. I am ready.'

Fanks bit his nails in impotent wrath, feeling himself quite helpless to deal with this man. He could not arrest him because he had not sufficient evidence to warrant his doing so. He could not force him to speak, as he had no means of commanding him. Altogether he was completely at the mercy of Judas in every way. Judas saw this and chuckled.

'Can I tell monsieur anything else?'

'Confound you, sir, you've told me nothing.'

'Eh, it is because I do know nothing.'

'That is a lie, Guinaud. I believe you know all about this case.'

'Monsieur does me too much honor.'

It was very provoking, certainly, and Fanks, seeing the uselessness of prolonging the discussion, was about to retire when a sudden thought entered his head.

'At all events, Monsieur Guinaud,' he said, deliberately, 'cool as you are now, you might not be so composed before a judge.'

'Ah! you will arrest me for the murder, well, I wait, monsieur for your pleasure. Bah! I am no chi d to be frightened by big drums.'

'I won't arrest you for the murder, but I will for stealing those letters.'

Judas winced at this. He was not very well acquainted with English law, and although he knew Fanks would not dare to arrest him on a charge of murder on the present evidence, yet he was by no means certain regarding the business of the letters. He thought a moment.

'You will arrest me for stealing what you do not know that I did steal?'

'What I know or what I don't know doesn't matter. I'll arrest you as soon as I can obtain a warrant. Once you are in the clutches of the English law, you won't get out till you tell all you know about this case.'

Octavius was simply playing a game of bluff with Judas, trusting to the Frenchman's ignorance of English law to win him the game. He was right in this case, as Guinaud did not know how far the arm of justice could stretch in England, and thought he might be arrested for the theft of the letters. If so, it would be fatal to his schemes, as he desired to avoid publicity in every way, and arrest at present meant the tumbling down of his carefully built house of cards. Having thus taken a rapid survey of the position, he made up his mind to save himself by the sacrifice of some one else, and he fixed upon Judith, who had tried to thwart him as the victim. With this idea he politely desired Fanks to be seated again—a request which that gentleman obeyed with a feeling of great relief, as he had played his last card in a desperate game, and was grateful to find that it had turned up trumps.

(To be Continued.)

Six carloads of cattle shipped from the Indian Territory, which passed through the Chicago stockyards on Wednesday morning consigned to Jacob Dodd & Co., are said to have the Texas fever, and the authorities at Buffalo will be notified of the fact.