

* A DAUGHTER OF JUDAS. *

By the Author of "Sir Lionel's Wife," "The Great Moreland Tragedy," Etc.

CONTINUED.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Morewood, as he walked along the well-swept path, with Kate's daintily-gloved hand on his arm, felt a delightful glow of happiness through all his veins.

His betrothed looked so bright and sweet.

The frosty air was calling a daintier colour to her cheek, and a bright sparkle to her eye.

Her laugh was clear and ringing, her step buoyant.

She seemed as happy as he.

It was long since they had been so happy together as they were that December afternoon.

If the truth must be told, Morewood and Kate had both been conscious of a cloud between them of late.

Perhaps that never-to-be-forgotten visit to the clairvoyante had worked mischief.

But whether this were so or not, assuredly there had been a touch of coolness about their intercourse with each other ever since.

In the early days of their courtship, Kate had not a scruple to show her lover how much she loved him; but of late she had been reserved, and even a little cold.

She never breathed a word to him of her suspicion that he had once loved Sir Gerald's wife; but the suspicion rankled in her bosom all the same, and subtly affected her manner towards him.

There are some men who will not show tenderness unless a girl shows tenderness in return.

Of this class was John Morewood.

When he found his betrothed disinclined to show tenderness, he abridged his own.

There had never been a ghost of a quarrel between them as yet; but nevertheless, both were conscious that their intercourse was not as delightful as it once had been.

On this afternoon, however, the old tenderness seemed to have returned.

Kate's hand pressed her lover's arm confidently.

His eyes, as they looked down into hers, were alight with happy love.

They walked for more than an hour.

Kate was almost as good a walker as Morewood, and kept pace with him well; but, at length, she suggested that it was high time to return.

"There is no hurry, dearest," he said. "Let us take just one more turn round the lake."

"I think we mustn't, John. I begged me not to be long away. She is all excitement over these theatricals, you know."

"Ah! is she bent on having them as ever? I declare I'd forgotten all about them."

"She is perfectly wild with enthusiasm. She'll make you take a part of some sort, John!"

"I know she won't!" laughed Morewood. "Play-acting isn't in my line at all. Has she entrapped you, little woman?"

"Oh, yes. I am to have a very ambitious part!"

Kate colored just a little, then added—

"I am to play Juliet!"

"Indeed! and who is to be the Romeo?"

"Mr. Rochefort."

Morewood stopped short, and looked steadily at her.

Greatly to her own vexation, she could not help coloring a little beneath his glance.

"Do you really mean this, Kate, or are you jesting?"

His tone was one of displeasure—as she was quick to feel.

"I really mean it!" she answered, and there was just the merest touch of defiance in her tone. "Why should I not play Juliet?—why should not Mr. Rochefort play Romeo?"

"I am not sure that I approve of your playing Juliet with any man," said Morewood, slowly; "but to Rochefort, as Romeo I have the most decided objection. His admiration for you has been too patent to please me for some time past. He is a man I mistrust, and dislike. It would annoy me very much to see him playing the lover to my betrothed wife!"

Morewood's tone was distinctly one of authority—a tone little likely to be borne by so proud a girl as Kate.

The mere fact that her lover was rich and she poor, made her peculiarly sensitive to any usurpation of authority on his part.

Hitherto he had never once offended her susceptibilities; but, in his not unnatural irritation, he did so now.

See drew herself up with a little haughty gesture, and her lips set in an obstinate line.

"The arrangement is made," she said, coldly. "I shall certainly not withdraw from it."

"Very well. My wishes, it appears have little weight with you."

He said no further word upon the subject—simply walked on in silence.

She saw he was gravely displeased; but her pride would not suffer her to make any effort to conciliate him.

Scarcely another word passed between them until they reached the house.

Then Morewood had Kate a cold "Good-bye," and remounted his horse, sending in

a message of apology to Mr. Muggleton by a servant.

Pride upheld Kate to some extent; but, nevertheless, there was a sinking at her heart as she watched him ride away.

CHAPTER XLIX.

JEALOUSLY.

The next morning, an hour after breakfast, a note was brought for Kate by one of the Court servants.

"Dearest Kate,—Can you come to me, if only for an hour? I want to see you very particularly indeed. I shall send the carriage."

"Yours affectionately,
"LILIAN VERE."

Of course, Kate complied with her friend's request.

On arriving at the Court she found Lillian alone in her boudoir, looking very lovely, but a trifle anxious.

"How good of you!" she said, rising to greet her friend. "But, then you are always good to me, Kate."

"Good to myself, you mean?" replied Kate, laughing, and kissing her affectionately. "I can tell you it's always a pleasure to me to come to you, Lillian. But now, what is this important business? Tell me quick, for I'm impatient to hear."

"Lady Vere colored just a little, and put her arm lovingly round the waist of her friend.

"Promise you won't be vexed with me, Kate!"

"Vexed with you? I couldn't be that if I tried, Lillian!"

"Well, then, Kate, I want to make peace between you and Morewood!"

Almost involuntarily, Kate drew herself away from Lillian's tender clasp—a flush rose to her cheek, a proud light to her eye.

Lady Vere, quick to read these signs aright, put out her hand, and touched Kate's, appealingly.

"Dear Kate, don't be angry," she said, gently. "I know I've no right to interfere, but Morewood asked me about it—and, oh, my dear! I do so want to prevent any serious misunderstanding between you two. You are both so proud. I tremble to think where it might end."

"Lillian, what has he been saying to you?"

"Not much, dear," said Lady Vere, hurriedly, as though to avoid further questioning. "He dined here last night, and while Gerald and Louis were playing a game of chess, he just said a word or two to me. I could see he was vexed at your playing Juliet. It makes me all the more unhappy dear, because it was I who suggested it. I told him so."

"It does not matter who suggested it. I have a right to please myself in such matters, and it is a right I mean to exercise, I do assure you. But now, Lillian, tell me this; did he ask you to speak to me?"

Lady Vere hesitated, and, in that hesitation, Kate read the answer to her own question.

Her heart swelled with wounded pride. To herself she said it was a proof that Morewood still loved this beautiful woman, that he must needs pour out his complaints into her ear, and invite her sympathy.

Against Lillian herself she felt no anger, but against him her anger was intense indeed.

"How dared he make complaints of her to another woman? How dared he?"

So her heart passionately demanded Lillian watched her in silence, and, as she watched, her own brow grew troubled.

A look of mingled sorrow and anxiety stole into her large, velvety eyes.

"Dear Kate," she said, at last, in a low, hesitating tone. "In one thing he is right. Forgive me for saying it, but Louis is in love with you. I have seen it for days past."

"Lillian!"

"It is true, dear. I know him better than you do. He conceals his feelings well, but he cannot altogether conceal them from me. He loves you, Kate. You may believe me—indeed you may!"

"I would rather not believe it!" said Kate, a little coldly.

"Kate, you are not angry with me?"

And Lady Vere looked into her face so beseechingly, and love, that Kate's heart could not but be melted in a moment.

"No, no! Don't think that," she said. "I am a little vexed with Mr. Morewood's unreasonableness. That is all."

"But, Kate, you will do as he wishes?" pleaded Lillian, and there was a world of wisdom in her eyes.

"No, Lillian. He has no right to dictate to me in this matter; no right to do me displeasure because I have thought fit to enter into such a simple arrangement without consulting him."

"But consider to what it may lead. He is very proud."

"So am I," said Kate; and anyone who had seen her at that moment must have credited her assertion. "Believe me Lillian it isn't of the slightest use for you to try to persuade me against your cousin. If Morewood had chosen to ask me it would have been different. But, as he has seen fit to take the tone he has, nothing on earth would induce me to oblige him in his whim."

And from this nothing could move her as Lillian was quick to see.

Kate remained to luncheon at Vivian Court, then returned to The Towers, in a troubled and indignant mood.

The fact that Morewood had made his confidante, ranked incessantly in her bosom.

It seemed to imply that his regard for her was still a tender one.

Against Lillian herself she felt not the least shadow of resentment; but perhaps on that very account, her resentment was all the stronger against him.

As soon as she reached The Towers, she went up to her room, sat down to her writing desk, and without pausing to consider whether her indignation was not leading her too far, she wrote this letter to her lover—

"I am amazed to find you have been discussing my conduct with Lady Vere. As you have thought to take such a step, I need make no secret of the fact that I am aware that you were at one time deeply in love with her."

"Pray understand me. I am not jealous of Lillian Vere. I know her too well and love her too dearly for that. But in the face of your evidently still tender regard for her, it is more than unreasonable—it is impertinent—of you to pretend to view with mistrust my acquaintance with Mr. Rochefort."

"I presume these remarks will not please; but, even should they displease you to the very fullest extent, you have your remedy."

"Kate."

Without giving herself a moment for reflection, she folded up this curt epistle, and despatched it.

CHAPTER L.

AN IDEAL ROMEO.

The night of the theatricals had come. There was great excitement at The Towers, for Mrs. Muggleton had invited everybody who was on her visiting-list; and, naturally, she, as well as the performers themselves, was almost painfully anxious that the whole thing should go off with befitting éclat.

Certainly, nothing had been left undone that could be done.

The performers had been studying and rehearsing for days; carpenter and decorators had been hard at work for the same length of time.

The chief performers were these—Kate as Juliet, Rochefort as Romeo, Sir Gerald as Mercutio, Harry Rolleston as Friar Laurence, and Vi as the old nurse.

Janetta sustained the part of Lady Capulet.

Marie would fain have acted as well as her sisters, but Mr. Tiptaft had dissuaded her from it.

He told her, with much solemnity, he was by no means certain that he, as parish priest, ought to so much as countenance play-acting by his presence.

However, he waived this point, and sat beside his betrothed in one of the front seats, with a face which clearly showed he meant to enjoy himself, and meant to make use of it in his next Sunday's sermon.

Kate was in a perfect fervor of excitement—in the gayest of spirits outwardly, but inwardly she was oppressed with a terrible sinking at heart.

Morewood had not so much as replied to that hasty and ill-judged letter of hers.

The very next day he had left Hampshire for Scotland, where he had an estate which needed his personal supervision.

She had known he intended making this journey, but not so soon, and when she found he had actually gone away without coming to say good-bye, her heart might well fail her.

Her sense of justice would not suffer her to blame him.

She admitted that her letter would justify him in breaking the engagement, if he chose to do so.

When she had told him that even if her remarks displeased him to the very fullest extent, he had his remedy, she had meant to throw down a gauntlet of defiance—she had meant him to understand she was willing to give him back his troth.

The question was, did he intend to take her at her word?

At first, when she heard of his departure for Scotland, she thought he did, and her heart all but failed her.

Perhaps she had never fully realized, till then, how much she loved him.

Still, her pride supported her, and she made no sign.

After he had been in Scotland a few days, he wrote to her—a studiously calm epistle, telling her what he was doing, and so on, but not so much as hinting at the subject of their estrangement.

She replied in the same strain, and three or four such letters passed between them.

Clearly, there would have to be an understanding of some kind between them when he returned.

It was impossible that things should go on like this.

Mrs. Muggleton had invited him to dine at The Towers on the evening of the theatricals.

He was expected home on that day, but, early in the forenoon, a telegram came, saying he should not be able to be with them until late in the evening.

He had not arrived when Kate retired to don her stage attire, and it was with a fast beating heart, and a heightened color, that she glanced round for him when she made her first appearance.

He was there, sitting between Mrs. Muggleton and Lillian Vere.

He looked paler than usual, and—

He gave no sign of having noticed her.

Seeing this, she rallied pride to her aid, and spoke her first lines with much grace and spirit.

She looked very lovely, in a gown of soft white silk, with a silver girdle, and, as the play proceeded, it was evident she possessed histrionic powers of no mean order.

The audience were unanimous in protesting it was rare that an amateur made so fine a Juliet.

But, clever as her performance was, it faded into insignificance beside that of Rochefort.

He was an ideal Romeo.

The fire, the passion, the naturalness he threw into the part, aroused the amazement of everyone.

In the famous balcony scene, he was so so impressed that Kate—as she stole a glance at Morewood's grave, stern face—could not help admitting that his objection was not an unreasonable one.

It was not likely that a lover should care to see his betrothed wife so passionately wooed—even in make-believe—by another man!

The play proceeded.

All went well and smoothly.

There was not a single hitch, and the curtain fell, at the end of the last scene, amid a perfect furor of applause.

The Muggletons' theatricals had been a distinct success.

Mrs. Muggleton had provided an elegant supper for her guests, and it had been arranged that the players should go down to it arrayed in their stage attire.

Kate lingered behind the rest, in the faint hope that Morewood might come in search of her.

Her hope was vain, but it chanced that, as she passed through an ante-room, she met him, and, for a single half-minute, they were alone together.

He greeted her with a kiss, but it was so cold a one that, in his proudly swelling heart, she vowed he should never give her such another.

The next moment a troop of people appeared, hurrying in to supper.

He turned away from her, and she saw him no more alone that night.

CHAPTER LI.

IN THE ARBOUR.

The next day, Morewood called at Vivian Court, and, as usual, was received by Lady Vere with a bright smile of welcome.

"I am so pleased to see you," she said, softly, "specially pleased. Kate is here."

"Oh, indeed?"

And he glanced round the apartment with a slightly heightened colour.

"She is in the park," said Lillian, noticing his look. "She has taken a fancy to sketch the old oak while the snow is on it. You know where I mean. She sketches in the arbour, just opposite the tree. I wonder if you would mind fetching her for me? I really think it is time she came in. She has been out in the cold too long."

Morewood's face wore its kindest smile as he looked at his friend's beautiful young wife.

He told himself he knew perfectly well that her motive in asking him to go in search of Kate was but that she might bring about a reconciliation between them.

Less observant eyes than hers must have noticed, last night, that all was not as it should be.

"I'll go with pleasure," he said.

And away he went, with quick strides, his brow knit in thought as he walked over the snow-covered ground.

The arbour to which Lady Vere had directed him was at a considerable distance from the house, and, on the way thither, he had ample time to reflect on how he should greet Kate when he saw her.

He still felt angry with her, but his commonsense told him it was impossible for them to go on in this estranged fashion much longer.

Assuredly there must be an explanation.

He must tell her how ill-judged were her suspicions in regard to his feelings for Lady Vere, and she must certainly be brought to admit that she had been unwise to play Juliet to the Romeo of Rochefort.

He had made up his mind to this when the arbour came in sight, and, at the same moment, voices proceeding from it fell on his ears.

One of the voices was Louis Rochefort's.

A wave of angry color swept across Morewood's brow.

Was it for this Kate had come away from the house to sketch in the wintry cold?

Another moment, and he was opposite the arbour, and could see inside it.

Kate was seated at the big oaken table, her head downcast as she slowly used her pencil.

Her cheek and her pretty ear were tinged with a rosy flush.

Morewood, fired by jealousy, told himself that flush had been called there by some look or word of her companion's.

He was standing close behind her, his head bent low, and he seemed to be speaking in a whisper now.

Morewood was not, by nature, a jealous man, but that night would certainly have fired the blood of a far more phlegmatic lover than he.

He strode swiftly forward, and stood in the doorway of the arbour, with a stern, cold face.

Kate looked up, with a start.

His footsteps had made no sound on the soft snow, and she had not been conscious of his approach until his shadow darkened her sketch.

Then he was in the doorway, regarding her with that stern, cold gaze.

She colored crimson, but in a moment regained her composure, and returned his look with one which, if not absolutely defiant, was certainly not calculated to conciliate an already angry lover.

"Kate, Lady Vere wishes you to return to the house. She has sent me to fetch you," he said, in a frigid voice.

The presence of Rochefort he altogether ignored.

He did not acknowledge it by so much as a nod.

"I will come presently," said Kate in a tone that was as cold as his own.

"I will wait for you!"

And, folding his arms, he leaned against the wall, with a look of stern resolve.

Rochefort's presence he still ignored.

Kate pretended to go on with her sketch, but she had much ado to keep her hand from trembling.

She was painfully agitated, but pride supported her, and kept her from giving way.

If it was Morewood's intention to make a display of his authority before Rochefort, she would not submit to it.

Such was her thought as she bent over the sketch, and forced her hand to continue its work with some show of steadiness.

Five or ten minutes passed in this way, and not a single word was spoken by any of the three.

The silence was truly oppressive.

At length, Kate laid down her pencil, and began to gather her drawing materials together.

Then Rochefort stepped forward.

"Allow me to carry them for you!" he said.

But Morewood stepped forward too, and spoke in a voice of thunder—

"No, sir!" he exclaimed. "You are too officious. Your very presence here is an intrusion! Are you aware that this lady is my betrothed wife?"

It was unwise of Morewood to bring matters to an open rupture like this; but he was bitterly angry, and is an angry man ever perfectly wise?

Kate rose to her feet—pale, but calm.

"Mr. Rochefort, I shall be greatly obliged if you will carry my things for me," she said. "I think Mr. Morewood scarcely knows what he is saying!"

"Mr. Morewood knows perfectly well what he is saying!" exclaimed the master of Beech Royal, indignantly. "He objects to see another man dancing attendance on his own promised wife, and he says, deliberately, that if that man were a gentleman, he would cease to pay those attentions. That is," he added, very slowly, and after a pause, "unless he has some secret assurance from the lady herself that they are not unwelcome."

Rochefort's handsome face was as composed as if it had been cut out of marble.

He seemed perfectly unmoved by Morewood's bitter speech.

He turned to Kate with an air of the most profound respect.

"Miss Lisle, shall I withdraw? Your wishes are my law in this matter."