

# A MODERN JUDAS.

OR, THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

## CHAPTER III.

PURELY THEORETICAL.

Roger Axton stood looking at the pill box on the table, and Octavius Fanks stood looking at Roger Axton, the former lost in a fit of painful musing (evident from his pale face, his twitching lips, his startled expression), the latter keenly observant, according to his usual habits. At last Roger, with a deep sigh, drew his hand across his brow and resumed his seat, while Mr. Fanks, picking up the pill box, gave it a cheerful rattle as he followed his example.

'What a strange coincidence,' he said thoughtfully; 'but I'm not astonished. This sort of thing occurs in real life as well as in novels. "Truth is stranger than fiction." I don't know who first made that remark, but he was a wise man, you may depend, and wonderfully observant of events before he crystallized his experience in those five words.'

'It certainly is curious,' replied Roger absently, as though he were thinking of something else. 'Fancy finding the name of the town where she—'

'With a large S, of course.'

'Where she lives printed on a pill box, finished Roger, and then after a pause.'

'What do you think of it, Fanks?'

'Think!' repeated Octavius thoughtfully.

'Oh! I think it is the clue to the whole mystery.'

'Why, what do you mean?' asked Roger in a startled tone.

'What I say,' retorted Fanks, twirling the pill box round and round. 'It's not difficult of comprehension. Man, name unknown, comes down here and dies shortly after his arrival. Inquest; verdict suicide! Fiddle-de-dee! Murder! And this pill box is the first link in the chain that will bind the criminal. By the way,' said Octavius, suddenly struck with a new idea, 'how long have you been at Jarlochester?'

'A week.'

'Oh! Then you were here when the man died?'

'I was.'

'Humph! Excuse my witness box manner.'

'Don't apologize,' said Roger quietly.

'Cross-examine me as much as you like. It seems second nature with detectives to suspect every one.'

'Suspect!' repeated Octavius in an injured tone. 'Good heavens, Axton, what are you talking about? I'd as soon think of suspecting myself, you peppery young ass. But I'm anxious to find out all about this affair, and naturally ask the people who lived under the same roof as the dead man. You are one of the people, so I ask you.'

'Ask me what?'

'Oh! several things.'

'Well, go on; but I warn you, I know nothing,' said Roger gloomily.

'I tell you what, young man,' observed Mr. Fanks sententially, 'you need shaking up a bit. This love affair has made you view all things in a most bilious fashion. An overdose of love and poetry and solitude incapacitates a human being for enjoying life, so if you are wise—which I beg leave to doubt—you will brace up your nerves by helping me to find out this mystery.'

'I'm afraid I'd make a sorry detective, Octavius.'

'That remains to be proved. See here, old boy. I was called down here about this case, and as the wisecrack of Jarlochester have settled it to their own satisfaction that there is to their minds no more need for my services, I am discharged—dismissed—turned out by Jarlochester & Co.; but as I don't often get such a clever case to look after I'm going to find out the whole affair for my own pleasure.'

'It seems a disease with you this insatiable curiosity to find out things.'

'Ay! that it is. We call it detective fever. Join me in this case and you'll find yourself suffering from the disease in a wonderfully short space of time.'

'No, thank you; I prefer my freedom.'

'And your idleness. Well, go your own way, Roger. If you won't take the medicine I prescribe you certainly won't be cured. Unrequited love will lie heavy on your heart and your health and work will suffer in consequence. Both will be dull, and between the doctors and the critics you will have a high old time of it, dear boy.'

'What nonsense you talk,' said Roger fretfully.

'Eh! do you think so? Perhaps I'm like Touchstone and use my folly as a stalking horse behind which to shoot my wit. I'm not sure if I'm quoting rightly, but the moral is apparent. However, all this is not to the point—to my point I mean—and if you have not got detective fever I have, so I will use you as a medicine to allay the disease.'

'Fire away,' old fellow,' said Axton,

turning his chair half round, so as to place his tell-tale face in the shadow, thereby rendering it undecipherable to Fanks; 'I'm all attention.'

Octavius at once produced his secretive little note book and vicious little pencil, which latter assumed dramatic significance in the nervous fingers that held it.

'I'm ready,' said Fanks, letting his pencil point rest on a clean white page. Question first: Did you know this dead man?'

'Good heavens, no! I don't even know his name nor his appearance.'

'You have never seen him?'

'How could I have seen him? I am exploring the neighborhood, and generally start on my travels in the morning early and return late. This man arrived at five, went to bed at nine, and as I didn't come back till ten o'clock I didn't see him on that night; next morning he was dead.'

'Did you not see the corpse?'

'No,' said Roger with a shudder, 'I don't care for such "wormy circumstance."'

'Wormy circumstance is good,' remarked Fanks approvingly. 'Keats, I think. Yes, I thought so. I see you don't care for horrors. You are not of the Poe-Baudelaire school of grave digging, corpse-craving poesy.'

'Hardly. I don't believe in going to the gutter for inspiration.'

'Ah! now you are thinking of MM. Zola and Gendrecourt, my friend; but, dear me, how one thing does lead to another. We are discussing literature instead of murder. Let us return to our first loves. Why didn't you attend the inquest?'

'Because I didn't want to.'

'An all-sufficient reason, indeed,' remarked Mr. Fanks dryly, making digs at his book with the pencil. 'I wonder you weren't called as a witness.'

'No necessity. I know nothing of the affair.'

'Absolutely nothing?' (interrogative).

'Absolutely nothing' (decisive).

Mr. Fanks twirled his vicious little pencil in his fingers, closed his secretive little book with a snap and replaced them both in his pocket with a sigh.

'You are a most unsatisfactory medicine, my dear Roger. You have done nothing to cure my detective fever.'

'Am I so bad as that? Come now, I'll tell you one thing; I slept in the room next to that of the dead man.'

'You did?'

'Yes.'

'And you heard nothing on that night?'

'If you had walked twenty miles during the day, Fanks, you would have been too tired to listen for the sounds of a possible murder.'

'Yes, yes, of course. What a pity we can't look twenty-four hours ahead of things; it would save such a lot of trouble.'

'And prevent such a lot of murders. If such prophetic power were given to humanity I'm afraid your occupation would be gone.'

'Othello's remark; yes, of course; but I'm sorry you slept so soundly on that night, as some one might have been in the dead man's room.'

'Why do you think so?' asked Roger quickly.

'Because the door was slightly ajar,' replied Fanks sagaciously; 'a nervous man would not have slept with his door like that. You're sure you heard nothing?'

'Quite sure.'

'It's a pity—a great pity. By the way, have you ever been to Ironfields?'

Roger hesitated, turned uneasily in his chair and at last blurted out:

'No; I have never been to Ironfields.'

'Humph!' said Fanks, looking doubtfully at him. 'I thought you might have met Miss Varlins there for the first time.'

'So I might,' replied Roger equably; 'at the same time I might have met her in London.'

'So you don't know anything about Ironfields.'

'Only that it is a manufacturing town given over to the domination of foundries and millionaires in the iron interest; to me it is simply a geographical expression.'

'I plead guilty to the same state of ignorance, but I will shortly be wiser, because I am going down to Ironfields?'

'What for?' demanded Roger with a start.

'I shouldn't let you into the secrets of the prison house,' said Mr. Fanks severely; 'but as you are "mine own familiar friend"—Shakespeare again, ubiquitous poet—well, as you are mine own familiar friend, I don't mind telling you in confidence I'm going down to see Wosk & Co., of Ironfields, chemists.'

'And your object?'

'Is to find out the name of the gentleman who bought those pills.'

'I don't see what good that will do.'

'Blind, quite blind,' said Octavius, nod-

ding his head mournfully. 'I will unfold myself—the immortal bard for the third time. When I find out the name of the deceased, which I can do through that pill box, I will be able to find out all about his antecedents. Satisfied on that point, it is possible, nay probable, that I may find some one who has ill-feelings toward him.'

'And therefore poisons him in Jarlochester while they remain at Ironfields,' said Roger ironically. 'I congratulate you on your clear-sightedness.'

'It's puzzling, certainly, very puzzling,' replied Fanks, rubbing his head with an air of vexation. 'I've got absolutely nothing to work on.'

'And are going to work on it.' Pooh! sandy foundations.'

'Now, look here, Roger,' cried the detective with great energy, 'let us survey this case from a common sense point of view. This man couldn't have come down to Jarlochester to commit suicide; he could have done that at Ironfields.'

'Perhaps he wanted to spare his friends—if he had any—the pain of knowing that he died by his own hand.'

'Rubbish! Suicides are not so considerate, as a rule. They generally make away with themselves in a most public manner, so as to draw attention to their wrongs. No, I can't and won't believe that this man, who gave no hint of wishing to die, came down here to do so.'

'Then if he did not kill himself, who did?'

'Ah! that's what I've got to find out.'

'Yes, and what you won't find out.'

'Perhaps yes, perhaps no. Murder will out. Clever remark that. But to continue: I always look on both sides of the question. It may be a case of suicide.'

'It is a case of suicide. I believe the jury are right,' said Roger firmly.

'You seem very certain about it,' remarked Fanks, a trifle annoyed.

'I only judge from what I have heard.'

'Rumor, mere rumor.'

'Not at all. Facts, my friend, facts. I allude to the evidence at the inquest.'

Octavius made no reply at first, but jumping up from his chair, began to walk to and fro with a frown on his face.

'I dare say you're right,' he said at length; 'taking the evidence as a whole, I suppose the jury could only bring in a verdict of suicide. No one could have poisoned him. No one here knew him, therefore had no reason to get rid of him. He took that morphia, opium or whatever it was, sure enough, and I firmly believe of his own free will. Judging from that theory, it looks decidedly like suicide; but then again he may have taken morphia, not knowing it was poison. It could not have been the pills, for they only contain arsenic. He might certainly have taken morphia in order to get to sleep, as from all accounts he suffered from insomnia—nerves, I suppose. But then some portion of what he took would have been found, and if not that, then the bottle that held the drug or sleeping draught; but nothing was found, absolutely nothing. He is discovered dead from an overdose of morphia, and no traces of morphia—bottle or otherwise—are found in his room. If it was suicide he would not have taken such precautions, seeing he had nothing to gain by concealing the mode of his death. If it was murder, some one must have administered it to him under the guise of a harmless drug; but then no one here knew him, so no one could have done so. You see therefore, my dear Roger, from this statement of the case, that I am absolutely at a stand-still.'

'Yes, I think you can do nothing, so your best plan is to accept the verdict of suicide and forget all about it.'

'And this pill box?'

'Well, you gain nothing from that except the name of the place where the dead man bought it. If you go to the chemist you will find out his name, certainly.'

p&gt;And the circumstances of his life also, you forget that.'

'No, I don't. But such discovery will hardly account for his murder here. If you find out from your inquiries at Ironfields that the dead man had an enemy you will have to prove how that enemy came down here and secretly poisoned him. Judging from all the evidence, there is no trace of poison left behind, no one has been staying in the inn except myself, so I really don't see how you are going to bring the crime home to any particular person.'

Having finished this speech Roger arose to his feet with a yawn and knocked the ashes out of his pipe against the mantle piece.

'Where are you going?' asked Fanks, stopping in his walk.

'To bed, of course. I've had a long day.'

'You continue your walking tour to-morrow?'

'Yes. I start at ten o'clock. And you?'

'I am going down to Ironfields.'

'On a wild goose chase.'

'That remains to be proved,' retorted Fanks grimly.

p&gt;I'm certain of it, so your wisest plan is to accept the inevitable and give this case

up,' replied Axton, holding out his hand.

'Good night.'

'Good night, old boy,' said Octavius cordially. 'I'm very pleased to meet you again. By the way, don't let us lose sight of each other. My address is Scotl nd Yard—my Fanks address, of course. And yours?'

'Temple Chambers, Fleet street.'

Out came Mr. Fanks' secretive little note book, in which he wrote down the address with a gay laugh.

'Ha! ha! Like all literary men, you start with the law and leave it for the profits.'

'Of poetry. Pshaw!'

'Eh, who knows? Every scribbler carries the laureateship in his brain. By the way, if I see Miss Varlins at Ironfields, shall I give her any message?'

'No; she won't have anything to do with me,' replied Roger dimly. 'I've no doubt I'll get married some day, but it won't be to Judith Varlins.'

'Ardent lover,' said Fanks laughing.

'Well, good night and pleasant dreams.'

'With that body upstairs. Ugh!' cried Roger Axton and vanished with a shudder.

Mr. Fanks stood beside the dying fire, leaning his two elbows on the mantle piece and thinking deeply.

'He's very much altered,' he thought drearily. 'Not the bright boy of ten years ago. How trouble does change a man, and love also. I'll make a point of seeing Miss Varlins when I go down to Ironfields. Rather a dismal love story, but what the devil did he tell me two lies for?'

He left the room, took his candle and retired to bed. As he closed the door of his room his thoughts reverted to Roger Axton once more.

'He told me two deliberate lies,' he thought with a puzzled expression on his face. 'I could see that by his face, or rather his manner. I don't like this.'

Having placed the candle on the dressing table, Mr. Fanks sat down, and having produced his secretive note book, proceeded to make therein a memorandum in short hand of his conversation with Axton.

No reason for doing so; certainly not. Still, name on pill box, Ironfields; residence of Judith Varlins, Ironfields. Curious coincidence—very. Nothing may come of it. Highly improbable anything could come of it. Still, those few lines of queer signs, recording an unimportant conversation, may be of use in the future. Who knows? Ah! who, indeed! There's a good deal in chance and fate sometimes puts a thread into our hands which conducts through tangled labyrinths to unknown issues.

'Two lies,' said Mr. Fanks for the third time. 'He hadn't seen her since Ventnor. He hadn't heard from her since Ventnor. Wonderful self-denial for a young man in love. I'd like to know more about Roger's little romance.'

EXTRACTS FROM A DETECTIVE'S NOTE BOOK.

Can't make Axton out . . . Most curious conversation—inquisitive on my part, evasive on his . . . He told me two lies . . . In fact, during the whole conversation he seemed to be on his guard . . . I don't like the look of things . . . I have no right to pry into Axton's affairs, but I can't understand his denials—denials which I could tell from his manner were false . . . Queer thing about Ironfields . . . The dead man came from Ironfields . . . Miss Varlins lives at Ironfields . . . Qy.: Can there be any connection between the deceased and Miss Varlins? . . . Impossible, and yet it's very strange . . . I don't like that open door either . . . That is extraordinary . . . Then the letter written by the deceased . . . I ask at the post office here about it . . . They could tell me nothing . . . I wonder to whom that letter was sent? . . . I think it's the key to the whole affair . . . Can Roger Axton be keeping anything from me? . . . Did he know the dead man? . . . I am afraid to answer these questions . . . Well, I'll go down to Ironfields and find out all about the dead man . . . Perhaps my inquiries will lead me to Miss Varlins . . . But no; there can be no connection, and yet I doubt Roger . . . I mistrust him . . . I don't like his manner . . . his evasive replies . . . And then he's connected with Miss Varlins—she is connected with Ironfields . . . That's connected with the deceased . . . All links in a chain . . . Most extraordinary.

Mem.—To go at once to Ironfields.

CHAPTER IV.

EVIDENCE OF A CHEMIST'S ASSISTANT.

Ironfields is not a pretty place; not even its warmest admirer could say it was pretty, but then its warmest admirer would not want to say anything of the kind. Well drained, well laid out, well lighted, it could—according to the minds of its inhabitants—easily dispense with such mere prettiness or picturesque as crooked streets, gable mansions towns, dating from the Middle Ages, could boast of. Poor things, those sleepy cathedral towns, beautified by the hand of Time—poor things indeed compared with vast Ironfields, the outcome of a manufacturing century and a utilitarian race! Ironfields with its lines of ugly model houses, its broad, treeless streets, its muddy river flowing under a hideous railway bridge,

its mighty foundries with their tall chimneys that belched forth smoke in the daytime and fire at night, and its ceaseless clamor that roared up to the smoke-hidden sky six days in the week.

The inhabitants were a race of Cyclops. Rough, swarthy men of herculean build, scant of speech and of courtesy; worn-looking women, with vinegary faces peering sharply at every one from under the shawls they wore on their tousled heads, and tribes of children, with just enough clothes for decency, grimy with the smoky, sooty atmosphere, looking like legions of small devils as they played in the barren streets, piercing the deafening clamor with their shrill, unchildlike voices. A manufacturing town, inhabited by humanity with no idea of beauty, with no desire beyond an increase of weekly wage or an extra drink at the public house. Humanity with a hard, unlovely religion expounded in hideous little chapels by fervid preachers of severe principles. A glorious triumph of our highest civilization this matter-of-fact city, with its creed of work, work, work, and its eyes constantly on the sordid things of this earth and never raised to the blue sky of heaven. A glorious triumph indeed—for the capitalists.

When it rained—which it did frequently—Ironfields was sloppy, and when Ironfields was sloppy it was detestable; for the rain coming down through the smoky cloud that constantly lowered over the town made everything, if possible, more grimy than before. But Ironfields was quite content; it was a name of note in commercial circles, and its products went forth to the four quarters of the world, bringing back in exchange plenty of money, of which a great deal found its way into the pockets of the master and very little into those of the man.

The country around was not pretty. Nature, with that black, ugly, clamorous city constantly before her eyes, lost heart in her work and did not attempt to place beauties before the eyes of people who did not know anything about beauty, and would have thought it a very useless thing if they had.

So the fields lying round Ironfields were only a shade better than the city itself, for the shadow of smoke lay over everything, and where sunshine is not cheerfulness is wanting.

On one side of Ironfields, however, nature had made a feeble attempt to assert herself, but then it was in a queer little village which had been the germ from whence arose this noisy town. In the old days the queer little village had stood amid green fields beside a sparkling river; but now the fields had disappeared, the sparkling river had turned to a dull, muddy stream, and the little village was improved out of all recognition. Like Frankenstein, it had created a monster which dominated it entirely, which took away even its name and reduced it from a quaint, pretty place, redolent of pastoral joys, to a dull little suburb, most inhabited by poor people. True, beyond stood the mansions of the Ironfields millionaires, glaring and unpicturesque, in equally glaring gardens laid out with mathematical accuracy; but the upper ten merely drove through the village on their way to these Brummagem palaces and did not acknowledge its existence in any way. Yet a good many of their progenitors had lived in the dull suburb before Ironfields was Ironfields, but they forgot all about that in the enjoyment of their new-found splendors, and the miserable village was now a kind of poor relation, unrecognized, uncared for and very much despised.

In the principal street, narrow and winding, with old houses on either side, standing like dismal ghosts of the past, was the chemist's shop, a brand new place, with plate glass windows and the name "Wosk & Co." in bright gold letters on a bright blue ground. Behind the plate glass windows appeared huge bottles containing liquids red and yellow and green in color, which threw demoniac reflections on the faces of passers-by at night when the gas flared behind them. All kinds of patent medicines were there displayed to the best advantage; bottles of tooth brushes, cakes of Pears' soap, vials of queer shape and wondrous virtue, sponges, jars of leeches, queer looking pipes compounded of glass and India rubber tubing, packets of fly exterminators and various other strange things pertaining to the trade, all calling attention to their various excellencies in neat little printed leaflets scattered promiscuously throughout.

Within a shining counter of mahogany laden with cures for the various ills which flesh is heir to; and at the far end a neat little glass screen with a gas jet on top, above which could be seen the gray-black head of Mr. Wosk and the smooth red head of Mr. Wosk's assistant.

(To be Continued.)

Scholasticus Hardup—I am a college student and I want a place to work in your hotel this summer. Hotel Proprietor—What experience or qualifications have you? Scholasticus Hardup—I am the champion boxer and wrestler of my class. Hotel Proprietor—Ah, then you will do very well to whip cream.