

# ✱ A DAUGHTER OF JUDAS. ✱

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

CONTINUED.

There was a smile on his lips; but, oh! the earnestness that shone in his eyes, as he repeated the question?—  
 "Why? My darling, I think you know. It is because I love you. Ah my heart's dearest, some day I hope to teach you to understand, and to return my love."  
 Her beautiful face wore a look of something almost approaching awe, as she gazed at him.  
 It was as though she was wondering—wondering how it was that this mighty passion, which could so stir him, evoked no answering emotion in her heart.  
 He caught her look, seemed partly to understand it, and with a sudden impulse, clasped her in his arms, for they had both risen to their feet by this.  
 His dark head needed to be bowed over so slightly for his cheek to be pressed to hers he was so little taller than she.  
 "My heart's beloved! my soul's darling! he murmured, and his musical voice was stirred by the depth of his emotion. 'I ask no more of Heaven, now it has given me you?'

But even while she listened to his breathings of love, there still remained on her face that look which spoke of deep and serious thought.

She still seemed to be wrestling with all the strength of her intellect, with difficulties which kept rising before her mind. Presently, she laid her hand lightly on his and said—  
 "Gerald, I want you to promise me something."

He looked at her with eyes which said that her wish, whatever it was, was granted before uttered.

"Yes dear?"  
 She pressed ever so slightly, the hand that held her own.  
 The mere touch of those soft fingers would have drawn him to the world's end, had she so willed it.

"You said you would see that old woman Madge again."

"Yes, dearest, and so I will."

"Ah! but that is what I want you to promise not to do—at any rate, not until after we are married."

The last words fell with a soft, sweet hesitancy from her lips; her eyes drooped a little beneath his tender gaze.

"You wish me not to go?" he said, not quite sure he understood her aright.

"I would rather you did not. I wish to see her myself; I should prefer it—if you do not mind."

"My darling, it shall be just as you wish. I thought, I might, perhaps, have some little influence over her. And won't it be very painful to you?"  
 "Yes; it will be painful," said Lillian, steadily. "But I would rather do it. Your influence would, of course, make itself felt even through me; and I believe that I, personally, could plead with her, for poor Madeline's sake, better than—yes, better than even you could."

"I have no doubt of that. Indeed, who could refuse anything to you, my love?"

"Then I will go to her. And, Gerald, remember you promise me not to speak to her—no, not even if you should see her—you will not exchange a single word with her before Thursday comes. I have a reason for this which I will tell you afterwards. You can trust me, Gerald?"

And she looked up into his face, frankly and fully, with those wonderful, soul-haunting eyes.

"Trust you? Ay, my darling! You know that well enough."

He thought she might fear his hearing from Madge something prejudicial to her sister's innocence.

A very natural fear in the heart of a loving sister, it seemed to him.

Assuredly, he dreamed of no other motive for the request.

"Well then, you promise me?" she said, a little anxiously.

"With all my heart, love, it shall be exactly as you wish."

CHAPTER XXIII.  
 WITH MADGE.

That same evening, a little before sunset, Lillian left the Court; and, taking the carriage-drive, arrived soon at the lodge gates, opposite which stood Madge's white-washed cottage, its garden and windows just now a mass of scarlet geraniums.

The old woman was in the garden, tying up a flower here and there, and glancing ever and anon across at Vivian Court with a deeply meditative look in her black eyes.

The moment Lillian's graceful figure came in sight, she saw and recognised her. "Hah!" she muttered between her teeth. "She comes to plead to me. If I had not drunk too deep of vengeance years ago to care to taste the cup again, how I might revel in it now!"

She is at my feet. She will be humble—she will beseech—she will implore. She will look at me with eyes that are so like those other eyes. Ah! do I not know them—should I not know them out of all the world!

She leaned against the side of the porch and seemed to be darkly musing.

None who saw her thus could doubt her mind was travelling over bygone years.

"Shall I spare her?" she muttered, looking gloomily at the still distant form of Lillian.

"Shall I spare, or shall I destroy? She has done me no harm: and for his sake—For a single moment she seemed to

soften; but the moment passed, and she murmured sternly, fiercely even—

"No! I will not spare. Water shall come from fire rather than that Margaret, the gipsy, should show mercy to one of that hated race."

By this time Lillian had reached the gates. She crossed the road, and entered Madge's garden.

The old woman had retired inside her cottage, and appeared as though she did not see her until she stood before the open door.

A moment she paused there—hesitant, uncertain.

Madge folded her arms, and gazed at her with a gleam of bitter mockery in her dark eye.

"And so you have come?" she said, disdainfully. "I have been expecting you."

"May I come in?" said Lillian.

She was white to the lips, and a tremor shook her as she noted the bitterness in the old woman's look and tone.

"Ay, come in, if it pleases you," said Madge, with a sarcastic pretence of deference.

She flung the door open wider as she spoke, and motioned Lillian to enter.

"What passes between us," she remarked sternly, "must be heard by no other ear!"

The interview was, indeed, a secret one.

It any had chanced to go to Madge's cottage on that autumn evening, they would have found the blind closely drawn, and the door locked, although the sound of muffled voices might have told them that someone was inside.

However, visitors were rare with the reserved old woman, and no one went near the cottage while that mysterious interview was taking place within.

A mysterious interview; ay, and almost tragical, if one might judge by the looks and attitudes of those two actors in it.

Lillian was on her knees, at the feet of the stern old woman, her hand outstretched imploringly, her beautiful face wearing a look of agonized supplication, such as might have melted a heart of stone.

But Madge's face showed no sign of softened feeling.

It expressed only stern satisfaction and fierce, almost exultant, joy.

Suddenly she stooped forward, and drawing her dress contemptuously away from the girl's beseeching clasp, laid her own hand on her shoulder, and shook her with a strength and fury almost incredible in one so old.

"Listen!" she said, in a voice of bitter vindictiveness.

And then, stooping still lower, she poured a few rapid sentences, with fierce energy and vehemence, into her ear.

Lillian seemed to hear with deepening, and still deepening horror; then, with a sudden despairing cry, she flung up her arms, as though in an agony of grief, and fell forward at Madge's feet.

Sir Gerald paced up and down the drawing room a little restlessly, now going to the window to watch the setting sun, now saying a word or two to Lady Ruth, as she sat, placid and tranquil, in front of her embroidery-frame.

"You are very restless, Gerald," she remarked, looking up at him with a gentle smile.

He started a little guiltily, almost as though he suspected a hidden meaning in her remark.

"I am looking for Lillian," he said. "That cloud in the west suggests a storm. I wish she would come."

"She is coming," said Lady Ruth, tranquilly.

Her embroidery-frame was close to the window, and her nephew's restless pacing

had taken him to the other end of the room.

"Is she?"  
 He darted to the window, made sure the approaching figure was really that of his love, then hurried from the room; and a moment or two later, his aunt saw him go down the steps in front of the house.

"Dear boy! how impetuous he is! How impulsive and eager!" she thought. "He always was, from quite a child; and I suppose he always will be. I shall really be glad when this marriage is over."

"He is almost like a woman in his delicate sensitiveness and susceptibility. I don't think this excitement can be good for him. Yes; I shall be glad when it is over. He loves her so intensely, I am certain he could never have been happy without her."

"She will make him happy; but after he had once seen her, it was useless to hope any other woman could."

By this time it will be seen that Lady Ruth was, by this time, resigned to her nephew's choice.

For one thing, she herself was greatly attached to Lillian; and, although she did occasionally heave a gentle sigh even now, as she thought of the wealth and fortune to which Sir Gerald might have aspired, yet, on the whole, she was content.

She had had a little romance of her own in bygone years; and, like all good women, she favoured 'a love match' in her secret heart.

Sir Gerald, meanwhile, had crossed the lawn with eager steps, to meet Lillian.

He knew on what errand she had gone, and was painfully anxious to know the result.

His heart sank a little as she drew near, and he saw how pale she was—how unutterably mournful and pathetic was the look in her dark eyes.

"Well, dearest?" he said, trying to speak cheerfully. "How have you sped?"

"She will keep my secret; she has promised me that!" she answered, in a low, weary voice.

"That's well. Though, really, in my heart, I had very little fear she would not. Old Madge has a true regard for me, I verily believe; and, Lillian, I am certain you may trust her. It she has promised to be silent, she will keep her word."

"Oh yes; I trust her!" said Lillian, still in that pathetically weary tone. "But, oh! Gerald she was very cruel!"

"Cruel to you, my darling?" exclaimed Sir Gerald, his eyes sparkling with ready indignation.

"Yes; very—very cruel!"  
 Something like a sob broke Lillian's voice; a mist of tears gathered before her eyes. By this time they had reached the house. One of the library windows stood open.

He drew her gently inside, passed his arm round her waist with a gesture of exquisite tenderness, and murmured, fondly—  
 "Cruel to you? How could she—oh! how could she? My darling, if only I could protect you from every breath of sorrow, how gladly would I do it!"

She slipped her hand into his, with a little soft, grateful pressure.

"I know," she whispered, "I know how good you are."

"And what was it Madge said?" he questioned, anxiously. "Tell me, dear. Wicked, hard-hearted old woman, to be cruel to my darling!"

"It was not to me she was so hard—not to me personally. But she spoke so bitterly of Madeline—oh, so bitterly! She thinks her guilty, Gerald. Nothing I could say moved her from that in the very least."

"Well, dear, never mind. So long as she consents to keep silence, it little matters what she thinks. And, by-the-by, did she tell you how she came to know this at all?"

"Yes; but don't ask me now. I—I am over tired. I will tell you all another time. But now I am weak and weary. Let me go to my room to rest; and, perhaps, I shall feel better soon."

"You shall, my love, you shall!"  
 As he said this, a world of tender soothing in his eyes, he turned her to him, and looked into her face with such a look of love as seemed to melt her to the heart.

"Oh, Gerald, all you show me of your goodness makes me more sure!" she cried, almost wildly.

"More sure of what?" he questioned, gently.

"That I ought not to marry you—ought not to bring dishonour near your name. Oh, Gerald! Gerald!"

And then, for the first time, she put her arms about his neck, and kissed him on the lips.

CHAPTER XXIV.  
 THE MARRIAGE.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here, in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony."

The white-haired old rector of Upton church pronounced the solemn exhortation in a slow, serious voice, as he stood against the altar rails, with Sir Gerald Vere and Lillian Delisle in front of him.

The congregation, to whom the words were addressed, was not a very large one. No guests had been bidden, and the village folk, knowing it was Sir Gerald's wish that the marriage should be private, had, for the most part, bridled their natural curiosity, and stayed quietly at home, instead of coming to witness the ceremony.

Only a few of the bolder sort had ventured to the church.

Certainly it was as little like a fashionable wedding as could be—no bridesmaids, no guests, no wedding-garments, no children, to scatter flowers at the feet of the bride.

Lillian had driven quietly down to the church with Lady Ruth, where Sir Gerald, attended by Morewood, awaited her; and, after the ceremony, she and her new-made husband, were to drive at once to The Dower House, five miles away.

They were not to return to the Court at all.

Lillian had pleaded for the ceremony to

be thus unostentatious, and Sir Gerald had acquiesced, willing, above all things, to please her, and only too happy when she expressed a wish that he could gratify.

Although she wore her travelling dress, she was all in white, like a lily, and as a bride should be.

A coat and skirt of pure white alpaca, almost as rich as silk, the coat revealing frills of delicate lace, where it opened over the vest.

A white hat crowned her golden hair, and she carried a bouquet of lilies of the valley and maidenhair ferns.

She was very pale, and her lovely dark eyes were a little sad and anxious in their glance; still she looked exquisitely beautiful—beautiful enough to justify Sir Gerald's adoring love.

When she first entered the church, she cast a hurried glance around, a frightened glance almost, as though she looked for someone she feared to see; but she recovered her usual graceful composure very quickly; and, when the time came for the utterance of the responses, her voice, though low, was perfectly firm and clear.

A very few minutes, and the ring was placed upon her finger; and the rector's voice solemnly pronounced them to be man and wife.

The prayers and psalms followed, with the concluding instruction, and then they moved towards the vestry to sign the register.

The bride was still very pale, but she signed her name without a tremor, and her smile was all sweetness, as she turned to receive her husband's kiss.

She clung to him a little, as though she found it pleasant to lean on his strong, protecting arm.

As they passed down the church to the carriage, Sir Gerald cast a swift keen glance around.

He was curious to know whether Madge was among the few villagers present.

He felt relieved to find she was not.

It was a proof she took no very deep interest in the wedding.

At any rate, so he thought.

Moreover, the memory of that ancient prophecy of hers made him feel, in some subtle fashion, as though her presence would have been like to work him ill.

The carriage which was to convey the happy pair to The Dower House, was a closed one.

Lady Ruth kissed the bride most affectionately; then Morewood, with a frank smile, claimed the same privilege.

A faint rose-flush suffused Lillian's cheeks as she received his kiss.

She tried to speak gaily.

A close observer, however, would have seen that her lips trembled.

The last farewell was said; Sir Gerald handed his bride into the carriage, and took his seat beside her.

The coachman touched up his horses, and off they went.

Once away from all fear of prying eyes, Sir Gerald gathered his bride into his arms, pressing upon her beautiful face a torrent of kisses, with lips that trembled with emotion.

"My Lillian! my love! my wife!" he murmured, anxiously. "Mine—for ever mine!"

The Dower House was reached early in the afternoon.

It was not quite five miles from Vivian Court, and was a comparatively new erection, having been built for Sir Gerald's grandmother on her widowhood.

A very dainty house it was, constructed of white stone, and surrounded on three sides by a balcony, which, just now, was brilliant with flowers.

Beautifully fluted pillars supported the porch, and smooth green lawn, with a miniature fountain in the centre, made a pretty object for the eye to rest upon from the front windows.

It was not a large house requiring, perhaps a half-a-dozen servants to keep a dowage in dignity and comfort there.

At present there were only four—butler, his wife, who was the housekeeper, and a couple of maids.

The coachman who had come with Sir Gerald was to sleep with the gardener in the village.

These four servants were called in the hall to receive the new Lady Vere.

She said a word or two to each in her sweet, pure voice, with such kindly graciousness of manner, as to quite win their hearts.

Passing through the cool, flower-filled hall, Sir Gerald led his bride to the dainty room, all pale blue and silver, which he had had newly upholstered to serve as her boudoir.

All that taste and wealth could do to gratify the senses had been done.

The window commanded an exquisite view of woodland scenery.

"Are you tired, my love?" asked Sir Gerald, tenderly, when she had admired the room—which she now saw for the first time—and thanked him for all his care for her pleasure and comfort. "Would you like some tea?"

"Not yet—thank you. I think I should like to change my dress."

"Then you certainly shall, love. I dare say one of those girls would be able to give you a little help. What a pity you would not let me get you a maid!"

"Oh, Gerald, I shouldn't have known what to do with her!" she said, smiling sweetly at him. "I have always been used to wait upon myself. It will be time enough for me to have a maid when we go back to the Court. I am sure I shall not want one here."

"Well, have your own way, love—you always do, you know."

And, with a fond look, she stooped to kiss her, then left her at her dressing-room door.

Half-an-hour later, she came down stairs, looking lovely as a poet's dream.

Aurora, goddess of the morning, could never have looked more fair.

She wore a tea-gown of white muslin, soft and fine as finest silk.

It was trimmed with cascades of lace, and there was a no of rose-colored ribbon at her bosom.

Her cheeks were faintly flushed, her eyes softly shining; her lovely golden hair was dressed in a fashion which became her queen-like beauty well.

Sir Gerald, pacing up and down the gravel-path in front of the open window, in a dream of happiness, saw her enter the boudoir, and, with all the eagerness of a lover, went in to meet her.

"Shall we have tea now dearest? Are you ready?"

"If you are, Gerald."

He touched the bell, and ordered tea to be brought in.

It was quickly forthcoming.

The table was spread with richly-chased silver and delicate china.

Lillian herself made the tea, and the attendance of servants was dispensed with.

Sir Gerald, his handsome head resting on the cushions of an easy chair, watched her every movement with a tender smile.

How sweet it was to be alone with her he thought—to know that henceforth they two would be all-in-all to each other—that the sweet communion, which only married life can give, was theirs.

How it thrilled him to see her perform her wily duties—to watch the dainty white fingers hover about the tea equipage.

She wore no ring save the plain gold circlet which betokened her a wife.

Sir Gerald's eyes were alight with happy love as they rested on that tiny golden band.

Tea over, they walked through the grounds, and to the edge of the wood which skirted the Dower House.

There was a glorious sunset.

The sky was all rose color and gold.

Sir Gerald, standing within the shadow of the wood, to watch those gorgeous, glowing tints—with his arm thrown fondly about his bride—told himself that just so roseate and golden was the promise of his future days.

Was it a cruel kindness of Fate's that nothing warned him of that which was so fearfully near?

He thought himself in the full sunlight, while, black as night, there frowned over his head the shadow of his doom.

To be continued.

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He Knew London.

"That's heard a lot about Lunnon, I reckon," queried the principal farmer of W——, a village not a hundred miles from a great provincial city.

"Oh, ay; Ah know Lunnon well," answered the old rustic addressed, sucking at his pipe.

"Man its a funny place," went on the farmer, "Talk about fog! Why its always foggy, an' you can't see one another's faces for it. They do, say it's people's own fault, too."

"How can that be?" asked the rustic languidly.

"Well, it they'd only keep their fires in all neat, instead o' kindling 'em afresh every morning, there'd be no fog at all. It's the smoke as does it."

The old rustic knocked the ashes from his pipe, reached out for his pouch, and deliberately recharged the bowl before answering.

"It don't seem much of a plan to me," he remarked at length. "Maybe it would work all right in Lunnon, but not in w——. There's too many chimbleys hereabouts!"

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