

## \* A DAUGHTER OF JUDAS. \*

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

CONTINUED.

'After I had been asleep an hour or two, I woke, and missed her from my side. Startled, I sat up, and then saw she was walking about the room; her eyes were wide open, but she was fast asleep.'

'I had known her do this once or twice before, but never had I seen her with such a look on her face as I saw then. Morewood, she was transfixed. Her face was the face of a beautiful fiend. It ever murder incarnate lurked in human eyes it lurked in hers that night. And no wonder! for, in her sleep she was living over again that hour in the wood when she met and murdered poor old Madge.'

'Will you betray me to Sir Gerald now?' she hissed, in a voice of wicked exultation. And then she made a movement with her hands, as though she were warding off some heavy body from falling at her feet. 'Babbling old fool!' she muttered. 'Did she think that I, who killed Miss Marshall years ago, would hesitate to sweep her from my path when, once she had dared to threaten me?'

'Yes, Morewood, those were her very words, and, after that, her power of cajoling me was gone forever. I felt to loathe myself when I remembered I was her husband—when I remembered how often I had held a murderer to my bosom.'

'Were you aware that she came to my room that night, or, rather, that I found her walking in her sleep, in the corridor, and drew her inside my door?' asked Morewood, abruptly.

Sir Gerald gave him a curious look.

'Yes, I knew it, and I know what use she made of the circumstance. She led you to believe I was jealous of you, and so accounted for my altered manner. Her one fear was, lest I should see you and tell you the truth. She need not have feared,' he added, bitterly. 'I had no wish to speak of the Veres—not even to you.'

'Gerald, tell me the truth in this—were you jealous of me?'

'That isn't an easy question to answer, Morewood. If she told you I mistrusted you because I saw her leave your room, she told you what was false; but it is true, that, for weeks before, I had seen that in her which made me feel it would be as well for you not to be a frequent visitor. Morewood, if ever she did love any man on earth, it was you!'

'I exclaimed Morewood, in bewildered amazement.

'Yes, you. She would murmur your name in her sleep, coupled with the tenderest endearments, and once or twice I have seen a look on her face which warned me I might have been a dishonored husband if I had a less honorable and faithful friend.'

'Veré, I swear to you I never dreamed—I know that. You I could trust—never for one single moment, did I doubt of your perfect loyalty creep into my mind. But, all the same, it wasn't exactly pleasant to know she loved you; and, as I have told you, suspicions of a darker sort were continually rising in my mind, so that I was troubled and oppressed almost beyond endurance.'

'Accept this explanation if, at times, I seemed to forget how dearly I loved, and how implicitly I trusted you. I had never had a friend like you before; I shall never have such a friend again. Indeed, I shall never form another friendship in this world.'

Morewood pressed the other's hand in silent token that he understood him.

There had been a quiet pathos in Sir Gerald's voice, as he uttered those last few sentences, which must needs have moved to pity anyone who heard it.

'Let me finish my story,' he said, after a brief silence. 'When I realized that it was Madeline Winter whom I had made my wife, I was, for a minute or so, like one paralyzed. I believe I was paralyzed with horror.'

'I saw her open the door and leave the room—still fast asleep—without attempting to stop her. I remember, dimly, feeling it would be a merciful ending to it all, if she inflicted some fatal injury upon herself—anything, anything—so that I might not have to look upon her living face again—so that I might not have to endure the torture of hearing her addressed as Lady Veré.'

'But she came back to the room awake startled, and alarmed; in deadly fear, I doubt not, lest she had betrayed her secret. The moment she saw my face, she knew she had done so. She fell on her knees, imploring me to believe her, using all the old arts to get me to believe it was her sister, not she, who was the murderer.'

'But the time had gone by for that. I had seen that awful look upon her face, and I knew that she was guilty. I made it clear to her then, that henceforward she was no wife of mine—that I considered myself as bound to a leper, whose even touch was pollution.'

'Later in the morning, Doctor Baker was sent for. My nerves were all disordered, and I was in a wretchedly feverish state, as you may well imagine.'

'To save appearances, I was compelled to suffer her to be often with me; but, oh! how I hate her presence, for my love was all turned to deadly loathing.'

'You I shrank from seeing. I felt I might, in my misery, be tempted to confide in you, and I wished to keep the secret locked in my own breast so long as she remained my wife.'

'I know, quite well, my poor aunt thought me insane, and I do not wonder at it. I let her think so if she chose. It was, a

any rate, an explanation of my altered looks and manner.'

'I should like to know one thing, Gerald. Did Lady Veré really and truly believe you were insane?'

'I cannot say. Of one thing I am certain, and that is, that her one hope and aim would have been to have me pronounced insane, and placed in a lunatic asylum. Failing that, she would not have scrupled to poison me, could she have done it with safety; but she knew I was on my guard, and that, if I had detected her in any such attempt, she would have paid for it with her life.'

'I came away from England because I felt how impossible it would be for me to disguise from those around us the deadly loathing she has inspired me with.'

'Of what my sufferings have been, I say nothing. You can, perhaps, guess at some faint shadow of them. The tortures of the lost is a phrase we use lightly. I shall never use it lightly again, for I have tasted its deepest meaning.'

'What torments can be worse than mine—worse than the agony of finding that it was on a murderer and a fiend I had lavished a love such as it is not often a woman's lot to inspire in man?'

Sir Gerald ceased, and, crossing his hands above his breast, looked fixedly at the marble features of her who had been his wife.

Morewood's brain felt dizzy with excitement.

The tale to which he had listened was so appallingly tragic, so steeped in horror that it was well nigh impossible for him to realize that it was true; and yet, there was that on Sir Gerald's haggard face which scarcely suffered him to doubt.

Presently, as he stood silent and motionless, a terrible thought darted, swift as lightning, into his mind.

On the impulse of the moment he gave utterance to it.

'Gerald,' he gasped, rather than said, his voice hoarse with excitement—'Gerald, is it true her death was as they said? That overdose of chloral—was it—accidental?'

'It was not!'

Clearly and sternly the words fell from Sir Gerald's lips.

Morewood looked at him with an ever-deepening horror.

Something in his heart told him that the most tragic part in the whole story had yet to come.

'She died by my hand,' went on Sir Gerald, slowly and sternly. 'Her husband was her executioner. A hard task, Morewood, and one which will leave its mark upon me till my dying day. But I did not shrink from it, and I tell you now, frankly and sincerely, I am glad I did not. You remember the story of Judith Veré. Well I have done as she did—I have saved the honour of the Verés.'

'My God!'

Morewood was a man whose feelings were habitually under a strong control; but he could not have repressed that horrified ejaculation, neither could he keep the color from dying out of his face, until it was almost as white as Sir Gerald's own.

'I knew you would be shocked,' went on Sir Gerald, in a tone of unnatural calmness. 'This is what I meant when I said you would, perhaps, never touch my hand in friendship again. I have no wish to defend, or excuse myself. I am past all that. And, besides, what I did was done too deliberately for me to make excuses for it now.'

'Ever since I knew the truth, I have asked myself, many times, whether I ought to suffer her to live; and yet I knew full well I could not give her up to the law. If she died at all, it must be by my own hand. It was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

was a terrible thought, Morewood, I

shrank from it; but I have been brought to it at last.

'I was sitting in my room the night before last, when she came to me with the old story—protesting her innocence, and trying to conquer me with her sweet looks and still sweeter voice. But the time for that was gone. I had caught a glimpse of the soul that lay beneath that beautiful mask. Then she pleaded to me to be reconciled to her, because she expected to become a mother. Think of it, Morewood!—she, a double-dyed murderer, the mother of my child!'

'That decided me. When she had gone, I made up my mind, sternly, steadily, and deliberately, that she must not live to bring forth a child in whom would flow her tainted blood. I dared not accept the responsibility of peopling the world with a race of fiends, especially as they might, like her, delude men by wearing angel's guise. I resolved that she must die that night!'

'I prepared the fatal draught, and went with it to her room. She was asleep, and looking as calmly beautiful as she does now. I awoke her. She saw, by my looks, what I had come to do. There was little need for me to tell her. She was very brave—braver than I had thought to find her. To me it seemed as though a soul so evil must needs stand in horrible dread of death.'

'But when I bade her offer a prayer to God for mercy on her guilty soul, she drew herself up in scorn, and said: "I have no God. I can die as I lived! I am not a coward. Besides I have known, for days that my death was at hand!"'

'And with that, Morewood, she took the poison, and drank it to the last drop. The end came very soon. There was no pain. Nothing but a sleep that merged slowly into death. I sat beside, and watched her die!'

He paused.

'A spasm of pain contorted his livid features—his voice almost broke; but in a moment or two, he recovered himself, and went on in a tone of sorrowful sternness, which went to Morewood's heart—'

'Of my own sufferings I have no wish to speak. To Heaven alone I hold myself accountable for that deed. In the eyes of heaven alone I shall make my expiation for whatever guilt attaches to it.'

'To me there seemed literally no alternative. What I did was done calmly and deliberately, in no heat of passion or resentment, with no wish save to free the world from one who had no longer the right to live, and to keep her from transmitting her evil nature to future generations.'

'For myself, I should be glad and willing to lay down the burden of life. But I have my sin to expiate—and other work to do. Since I came to Italy, I have been convinced that the one true religion is that of the Roman Catholic Church. I shall retire to a monastery, and there devote my life to praying for the soul I hurried into eternity in the midst of its awful guilt.'

'My Cousin Charles may take all that I possess. The Court is his from this moment. I hope he will try to keep unstained the honor of the Verés.'

'Now, Morewood, I have done. You, and you only, out of all the world, will know my secret, and I have told it to you because my heart, detached from almost every other earthly thing, clings to you, and craves for your friendship even now.'

'The yearning for sympathy in these last few weeks has almost broken me down. The impossibility of getting it has filled me with despair. But now I have seen you, face to face, and whether for the last time or not, I have felt the clasp of your hand. I don't know whether you are able to understand my motives, as I have tried to make them clear to you; but, even though you fail to understand me; you will, at any rate, believe that I have suffered much. I loved her once.'

Again a cruel spasm contorted his features.

'And, even in a righteous cause, blood-guiltiness is a heavy burden to carry on one's soul. If you cannot give me your friendship, give me, at least, your pity. God knows I need it sorely!'

Of all men on earth, John Morewood was, perhaps, the least likely to hear that appeal unmoved. His friend was his friend still, let what might of horror stand between them.

He stepped forward and took Sir Gerald's hand in a warm, close clasp, while his countenance showed eloquently how he pitied him.

'Heaven help you, Gerald!' he said. 'I wish I could say anything in the way of comfort; but there is no human comfort for a grief like yours. But, at any rate, you mustn't think my friendship fails you. No, no, Gerald! Never, never think that!'

'God bless you, Morewood!' whispered the wretched man.

Then his unnatural calm gave way. He broke down utterly, and wept like a woman, while great sobs convulsed his frame.

In all his life, Morewood had never witnessed a more painful sight, or one that touched his heart more deeply.

### CHAPTER LXXI.

MOREWOOD RECEIVES A VISITOR.

Late that evening Morewood was alone in the apartments which had been set aside for him.

Sir Gerald, after that paroxysm of mental anguish, was quite prostrate, and was now lying on his bed, in a vain attempt to sleep.

As Morewood sat meditating on the grim tragedy in which he himself had been so deeply involved, a servant knocked at the door to say, in a hesitant and an apologetic fashion—

'I beg your pardon for intruding, sir; but there is a gentleman just come, who begs to see you very particularly indeed. I told him you had asked not to be disturbed; but he said, if I brought this note to you, he was quite sure you would see him.'

'Give me the note,' said Morewood; and

taking it from the man, he tore it open, and glanced at the signature.

'Thomas Browne! I know no one of that name,' he thought; but, the next moment his eye fell on the words—'When I was called in to attend Miss Kate Lisle, at Vivian Court'—and then he remembered perfectly, the plain-featured but skilful young doctor who had done so much for Kate.'

He read the letter through.

It ran thus—

'Dear Mr. Morewood.—I know I ought to apologize for intruding on you at such a time; but when I tell you I have travelled fifty miles to see you, after telegraphing to England, to inquire your whereabouts, you will understand I am not seeking an interview on any idle or frivolous pretext.'

'My name, I think, you may be able to recall. I met you often, in Hampshire, last year, when I was called in to attend Miss Kate Lisle, at Vivian Court.'

'I will only add, that what I have to say concerns someone who is very dear to you. Yours faithfully,

'Thomas Browne.'

'Bring the gentleman to me, here,' said Morewood, wondering, greatly, what it was Dr. Browne had come to tell.

In a minute or two the doctor appeared, grave and weary-looking.

He had heavy anxieties during the last day and night, and had not closed his eyes in sleep.

Morewood held out his hand to him.

'You come at a sad time, doctor,' he said. 'I presume you know Lady Veré is dead?'

'I do.'

Dr. Browne's tone was so meaning, although very calm and quiet, that Morewood said, involuntarily—

'Is it about her you have come to speak?'

'It will be my very painful duty to say a great deal concerning her, Mr. Morewood. Last night I listened to the confession of a dying man—a confession so strange and startling, that I can scarcely expect you, at first, to believe it true. I am empowered to repeat it to but two people on earth—one is yourself, the other Sir Gerald Veré. Understanding that he is quite worn out with grief, I have thought it best to come first to you.'

'Go on,' said Morewood, looking at him intently.

'I have, of course, your solemn promise not to repeat what I am now about to tell you.'

'You have; but I am not at all sure I don't already know it. Tell me one thing. Has your story any reference to Madeline Winter, the suspected murderess of Miss Marshall of Brookstone?'

'It has. Now, Mr. Morewood, please be frank with me. As the dearest friend of Sir Gerald, you have, probably, heard much from him to-day. Forgive me, if I ask you, plainly, whether he has told you who Lady Veré really was?'

'Yes, Doctor Browne, he did.'

The doctor drew a deep breath of relief.

'I am glad of that—very. It makes the rest of my story so much easier to tell. Nevertheless, you must prepare to be greatly startled. Since you already know that Sir Gerald's wife was Madeline Winter, I need only tell you one important fact, which even Sir Gerald himself, has I believe, never guessed at. I can only hope and trust it will be happy news to you.'

'Happy?'

And Morewood, as he spoke, looked the astonishment he felt.

'Yes; I both hope and believe that you will so regard it; assuredly you will, if you have any spark of affection left for the lady you once loved so well. Mr. Morewood, Miss Lisle never eloped with Louis Rochefort, as was believed. She was kidnapped and has been kept a prisoner ever since.'

'What?'

Morewood sprang from his chair in uncontrollable excitement, his face flushed with feelings working with emotion.

'It is quite true, Mr. Morewood. All the time you have been thinking of her as false to you, she has been living not more than fifty miles from here the victim of a diabolical plot as, perhaps, ever entered a human mind.'

'And who has been the doer of this vile thing?' exclaimed Morewood, his eyes sparkling with fury, as his thoughts flew to Louis Rochefort.

'That daughter of Judas—Madeline Winter.'

'Go on! Quick—quick—tell me everything. For Heaven's sake don't keep me in suspense.'

'I will tell you this much briefly—the rest will do later on. Miss Lisle was decoyed from The Towers, and placed under the influence of a drug of the most infernal and fiendish character—a drug which so completely robbed her of her memory that she lost all consciousness of her own identity. She was brought to a house in a lonely spot in the Campagna, and there kept in close surveillance by the sister of Lady Veré.'

'And the motive for this outrage?' demanded Morewood, still so terribly excited as to be scarcely able to control his voice. 'Can't you guess, Mr. Morewood? Lady Veré was in love with you. Miss Lisle was her rival—her successful rival—and, therefore, she removed her from her path.'

'Great Heavens!' exclaimed Morewood, his indignation, for the moment, giving place to blank amazement.

Then his feelings of tender pity and concern for Kate were in the ascendant and he said—

'Is her memory still lost? Is there any hope of recovery? Oh, Kate! Kate! my bonny beautiful love! To think I should have been hardening my heart against you, instead of coming to your rescue, all this time!'

These last words were spoken scarce ly higher than a whisper; but Dr. Browne heard them, and hastened to give his more cheering news as quickly as possible.

'I am very glad to be able to tell you I have every hope that Miss Lisle's memory will soon be thoroughly restored,' he said.

'By a most fortunate chance, I have in my possession a drug which is the antidote to the one administered at the command of Lady Veré. Indeed the drug itself is not permanent in its effects. Unless it is administered frequently, its effects wear away. I believe I am right in saying that, in a day or two, Miss Lisle will be practically herself again.'

'But now, with your permission, I will tell you the whole story, as it became known to me.'

'Thank you, doctor; I shall be glad to listen.'

Morewood spoke calmly, although, as may be imagined, his inward agitation was very great.

'To begin with, then, I will tell you how I came to discover the whereabouts of this deeply-wronged young lady.'

And, as briefly as possible, Dr. Browne told what is already known to the reader, concerning his discovery of poor Kate, beginning with Sir Patrick's meeting with her and ending at the hour when Louis Rochefort lay face to face with death, and resolved on a confession.

'Now,' said the doctor, at this point, 'I come to the real pith of my story. According to Rochefort's confession, he had two sisters, one older than himself, named Leila, the other younger, Madeline.'

'His sister!' exclaimed Morewood. 'I never dreamed of that.'

'Yes, his sister, or, to speak more correctly, his half-sister; for he and Leila, were by the first husband of James Winter's wife. His name was Rochefort, and he died while the two children, Leila and Louis, were in their infancy.'

'The mother seems to have been a remarkable woman, a very beautiful Creole, deeply learned in Oriental drugs, in mesmerism hypnotism, and kindred sciences.'

'Lady Veré told you—when she saw you detected a resemblance to the woman you had rescued from her coffin—that her mother had been twice married, and this was true; but she, to suit her own interests, made it appear that she married again after the death of James Winter, whereas Winter was her second husband.'

'And the other daughter—the one you call Leila?—interposed Morewood, mindful of the woman he had seen in the lane near the Court at midnight, and, again, at Southampton Railway Station.'

'She was some years older than Madeline, and there was a strong resemblance between them—that is, in the eyes, not in any other feature. While Leila was young in her teens, the mother died, and she grew passionately fond of the little sister thus left to her care. Indeed her love for Madeline became the one great passion of her life.'

'Years went by, and Madeline, at the age of five-or-six-and-twenty, met Miss Marshall, and accompanied her home to England, from Australia.'

'Of the murder of Miss Marshall I need scarcely speak. Madeline had got some Oriental poisons into her possession, and she administered a fatal draught to the old lady, almost as soon as she had induced her to make a will in her favour.'

'Suspicion fell upon her, as you know, and, despairing of escaping in any other way, she hazarded the desperate experiment of swallowing a drug which produces a cataleptic state similar to death. Her hope was, that she would be left alone, would recover consciousness, and be able to effect her escape.'

'At any rate, the chance was preferable to the certainty of the gallows. But, as it happened, she was put into a coffin almost immediately, and, but for you, she would have died inside it.'

'Had she done so, she would, at least, have been spared another terrible crime,' said Morewood, gloomily.

'I know. You refer to the murder of that poor old woman. I shall come to that presently; but now I must tell you what happened to Madeline Winter, after you parted from her at London station.'

'She got safely to France within a day or two, and from there to Italy, where her brother and sister were. For a time she lived with them, in an out-of-the-way spot; but she had a restless nature, and boundless ambition.'

'She longed, greedily, for rank and wealth, and in those days, her one thought was, how she could preserve and increase her personal beauty; for by its means she was resolved to make a wealthy marriage.'

'Her natural beauty was great, but she studied, day and night, to improve it by arts such as only Orientals know.'

'Was it really true that she was six-and-twenty when I first saw her?' questioned Morewood.

'It was perfectly true. Nevertheless, I am assured that when she came into Hampshire, no one would have dreamed she was more than one-or-two-and-twenty.'

'I am sure they would not. How was that wonderful look of youthfulness obtained?'

'You remember her exquisite complexion—well, that was the main secret. She had discovered some marvellous unguent which gave a beautiful fairness and smoothness to her skin, and prevented a single line or wrinkle from making its appearance.'