

✱ A DAUGHTER OF JUDAS. ✱

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

CONTINUED.

Harry Rolleston, young, frank-faced and fair, looked an ideal lover for pretty Vi, with her rosy complexion, her curling hair and bright, sparkling eyes.

And, certainly, Morewood seemed equally suitable for Kate Lisle.

She was slender and graceful, with refined features, and charmingly high bred manner.

And he, with his tall, stalwart form, and fine mouth and eyes, was just the man to please the taste of such a girl.

Her eyes might well hold a happy light behind their dark lashes; the soft color in her cheek might well deepen beneath his glance.

'Oh, the radiant god of love!—how beneficent he is!

How he sustains the spirit; vitalizing the pulses, and making warm the heart!

In these fine de-sicle days it has become sadly too much the fashion to saucer at him, and to place above him the empty baubles of ambition, and wealth and fame.

But woe to those, be they individuals or be they nations, who displace him from his proper throne.

Happy the people who, even in this sordid, money-getting age, have resolved that "Love shall still be lord of all!"

When the shadows began to lengthen, and the autumnal sun to lose something of its warmth, the girls rose, saying it was time to go home; and, of course, their squire rose with them.

Harry Rolleston and Vi walked a little ahead of the others.

Kate seemed anxious to overtake them, for a sudden tremor had fallen upon her, disturbing her usual graceful self possession.

'Haden't we better walk a little faster?' she said, in quite a nervous flutter. 'We shall never catch them up.'

'I don't think they will mind that. I'm sure Rolleston won't. He likes to be alone with Miss Vi.'

'Yes, I think he does,' murmured Kate still more tremulously.

Morewood turned fully towards her, his eye all aglow with love.

'And I like to be alone with you. I think you know that, Kate.'

Her heart beat quick; the lovely soft colour deepened and deepened in her cheek.

His face grew still more tender; his voice sank to a whisper.

'Kate, am I too bold? Are you vexed with me?'

'Vexed? Oh, no!'

'Then, dearest!—he had got her hands now and was standing quite still, with his face very near her own—'may I go on being bold? May I be bold and bolder still? May I tell you how dear you are to me? Nay, I never could tell you that, darling! Words are so poor and weak. But if you'll be my wife, Kate, the devotion of my life shall show it!'

Vi and her lover were quite out of sight now.

There was no one to cast a prying eye on those two, as they stood together beneath the trees beside the shining river—he telling and she listening to the tale which has been the sweetest thing on earth since Adam and Eve stood in the Garden of Eden, and will be so until the last man and woman have ceased to live.

'Kate, darling, haven't you a single word to say to me?' pleaded Morewood, bending his handsome head still nearer hers.

'Yes, Mr. Morewood, if you'll tell me what word it is you want!' said Kate, blushing very much, but speaking with a sort of tremulous demureness.

'I'll ask a question and then you'll know the word I want. Do you love me Kate?'

Her answer was given in a single word—a word spoken in the softest of whispers—so low as only to be heard by the quick ears of love. Another moment, and his arm was thrown round her; she was pressed to his heart, and their lips met in a kiss of unutterable sweetness.

Then, of course, followed those tender nothings of which lovers never tire, but which the rest of the world has long voted a bore.

There were questions and confessions, gay and teasing on his part, sweetly tremulous on hers, as to when each had first learned to care for the other.

Morewood told her how he had fallen in love with her figure even before he had seen her face, and she in turn, confessed that she had liked him as soon as he had begun to speak to her.

The little purse, whose defective clasp had been the occasion of their acquaintance, was declared by the happy lover to be the dearest little purse in the world.

And Kate, listening to this sweet nonsense, with flushing cheeks and happy eyes, resolved within herself that the same purse should never be consigned to destruction as other purses where, but should be hoarded up among her choicest treasures for evermore.

And so they poured out their hearts to each other in the same old-fashioned way, while the willow trees stretched out their arms caressingly, and the river, which had seen so many happy lovers on its banks hurried down to the sea, to tell it that 'Love was still the lord of all!'

CHAPTER XXXII.

HARRY ROLLESTON HAS AN ADVENTURE

It was a great pity that those two other lovers—Harry Rolleston and Vi—should not have been as happy as Kate and Morewood that September afternoon.

But between them there stood a great barrier—a perfect mountain of gold.

Poverty is a grievous obstacle in the path of love, sometimes; but it may be questioned whether wealth is not an even greater one.

Certainly, if pretty Vi Muggleton had been penniless, instead of heiress to a million, Harry Rolleston would long ago have put a betrothal ring on her finger, and they would have gone forth, bravely to face life's ills together.

But, as it was, that yellow mountain loomed up in front of them, and threatened to be a very serious bar to their happiness.

Yet, although it is said the course of true love never does run smooth, Fate sometimes shows a kindness to young, true-hearted lovers.

And, the very day after that walk beside the river, a circumstance befell, which promised to do a great deal for Harry Rolleston and Vi.

On that morning Mr. Muggleton went out alone, as he often did, to take a walk around his fields.

Latterly, he had taken an interest in agriculture, and had begun to farm some of his own land.

As he crossed a public road, he met young Rolleston, and greeted him with a genial word and nod—without stopping to enter into conversation with him, however.

'I like that young man,' he soliloquized; 'but I'm not at all sure I ought to encourage anything between him and Vi. Jane's dead against it; and I don't know that I care enough about it to put my foot down very firm. Perhaps she's right. It may be only the money he cares for, and not the girl herself. And she certainly might do better. A bright, pretty little lass, such as she is, with a million pounds at her back, might do a great deal better than marry the nephew of a ruined country squire.'

'I don't see why I should give a million pounds to a man, simply because he chooses to ask for it. One does expect something in return. Jane's right enough there. On the whole, I think I shall tell Vi there'd better be no more sweetheating between her and him. She's fond of him, I do believe—that's the worst of it. But somebody else'll be coming forward, and that will make her forget!'

Having thus settled his daughter's affairs, the honest gentleman turned his thoughts to agricultural matters.

In a field hard by there was some property of his—a lordly bull, which he hoped would be a prize-winner at the next county show.

He bethought himself that he would go and take a look at the animal.

It was his boast that it knew him, and would never attempt to injure so much as a hair of his head.

Accordingly, he opened the gate, and walked boldly into the field, with no other weapon of defence than a stout walking-stick.

He came well-nigh paying a very severe penalty for his boldness; for, no sooner was he fairly in the field, than the bull began to show the most unequivocal signs of an unfriendly disposition.

It lowered its head, switched its tail, pawed the ground with its fore-feet, emitted a truly fearful roar, and then, without any more ado, lowered its horns and rushed straight at its too confiding master.

The millionaire was a stout man, and not accustomed to violent exertion; nevertheless, he managed to skip about with an energy which would not have disgraced a much younger man.

Fear, it is very well known, lends wings; and, if fear did not absolutely do that for Mr. Muggleton, it at any rate imparted considerable agility to his legs.

He managed to evade those terrible horns; but, unfortunately, he could not, at the same time, keep in line with the gate; and the thick-set hedge was too high for him to hope to get out of the field by any other way.

He began to feel his strength exhausted; his knees shook under him, his breath came thick and fast, and he was just giving himself up for lost, when someone leaped over the gate, and unhesitatingly ran across the field to his assistance.

'Get to the gate, sir! Leave him to me. I'll tackle him!' shouted Harry Rolleston, for it was to him the kindly Fates had assigned the office of saving the father of his beloved.

Mr. Muggleton was too thoroughly exhausted to refuse to avail himself of the chance of escape so generously offered him.

He made the best of his way to the gate, leaving Rolleston to face the enemy.

The bull suffered him to depart without opposition; his rage was now wholly directed against Harry.

Harry danced about in front of the bull in the most exasperating manner.

A Spanish matador might almost have envied his agility.

How long he could have kept this up, it is impossible to say, and, fortunately, unnecessary, for the millionaire, having reached the gate, spent his little remaining breath in shouting so lustily for help, that he was heard by a couple of men in an adjoining field, who made their appearance, armed with pitchforks.

At the sight of these reinforcements,

the bull gave up the contest, and with a final roar of disgust, retreated to a corner of the field.

Mr. Muggleton, watching the proceedings with breathless interest, stood by the gate to receive his preserver as he came forth. He grasped his hand warmly, but for a moment could not utter a word.

'I hope you're not hurt sir,' said Harry Rolleston.

The millionaire shook his head.

His breath had not yet come back to him.

He stood leaning against the gate, and mopped his crimson face with his handkerchief.

The two labourers came up, touching their hats to him, and grinning after the manner of their kind.

'I'm very much obliged to you?' he gasped out at length. 'Here, my men; go and get something to do you good.'

And he drew forth a couple of sovereigns, and gave one to each of them.

They touched their hats again and departed devoutly wishing that bulls would attack millionaires a little oftener.

Mr. Muggleton and Harry Rolleston were left alone.

'Young man,' said the millionaire, solemnly, 'you have saved my life!'

And he held out his hand again.

Harry shook it heartily, but disclaimed any special merit.

'Oh, no!' he said, 'You'd have managed all right, even without me. Those fellows would have come up, you know.'

'Yes, in time to have carried my dead body home—not before. I tell you I owe my life to you, I hope you won't find me ungrateful.'

'I'm sure I shouldn't, if there were anything to be grateful for,' said Harry, lightly. 'But there isn't. I did nothing. Why, I haven't got so much as a scratch. The brute didn't really mean mischief. It was half in fun!'

'Fun! Good Heavens! It seemed a very curious sort of fun to me cried the millionaire, aghast at the very remembrance of the position he had been in five minutes ago, and yet secretly admiring the cool pluck of this young squireling, who could treat the whole matter as a joke.

'If that's what good blood can do, it's worth something,' he owned, candidly, to himself. 'Lord! I could never have shown the pluck he did if I'd practised at it all my life!'

Aloud he said—'Mr. Rolleston, you'll go home with me? I feel a bit shaken, and I'd rather have your company, if you don't mind.'

'Certainly, sir.'

They turned towards The Towers.

'Will you take my arm, sir?' asked Harry.

'Thank you.'

And so they walked on together.

Very little passed between them till they reached The Towers.

Then the millionaire led the way to his private room, and forthwith gave utterance to the thoughts which had been in his mind during the walk homewards.

'Rolleston,' he said, 'I'm not much of a hand at fine speeches. You've saved my life, and I'm as grateful to you as a man can be whose life is pleasant to him, and a thing he wouldn't care to lose. I always liked you, and I like you more than ever now. What I want to say is this—if there's anything I can do for you, you've only got to mention it, and it's done.'

The millionaire spoke with significance. Harry Rolleston knew quite well that what he meant was—

'If you care to ask me for my daughter, she is yours.'

'You are very good sir,' said the young man, flushing crimson, and stammering a little in his emotion. 'But—'

'But what?' demanded Mr. Muggleton. 'But the only thing of value, in my eyes, which you have to give, is what I am not bold enough to ask you for.'

'Oh hang it all!' cried the millionaire. 'Now look here, Rolleston. You're a young man, and I'm an old one, but that's no reason why we shouldn't understand each other. If I'm making a mistake, you'll please tell me, and there's no harm done; and if not, I think I see a way of doing something for you in return for what you've done for me this morning.'

'Oh, sir, you think too much of that!'

'No, I don't. Now look here. I'm going to ask you two questions; and, if you're the sort I take you to be, you'll not be above giving me a plain, honest answer to both of them. The first is—do you love my daughter, Vi?'

Rolleston's answer was plain and honest enough.

'Yes, sir, I do!' he said, stoutly, and again a flush mantled his face.

'I thought so. Well, now—don't be offended—if my girl were poor, if she hadn't a penny-piece, should you still be willing to marry her? I ask you on your honor, as a gentleman.'

'I would rather marry her than than now!' declared Rolleston. 'Dearest to me she couldn't be; but I can honestly assure you that if the money lay on my side instead of hers, I should be a happier man.'

'That's all I want to know,' said the millionaire, cordially. 'Well, my boy, if you can get her consent, you've got mine. We can talk about money later on. I promise you it shan't be wanting.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HARRY'S UNCLE.

Squire Rolleston, Harry's uncle, was an elderly man, and one whose temper a good many years of worry and harassment had not tended to sweeten.

Rolleston Hall was a large, red-brick house in a ruinous condition.

For years it had had no money spent upon it and unless something were done soon, there was every prospect of its falling into decay.

On the evening of the day which proved such an eventful one for Harry, the old

squire stood in his dining-room, waiting for his nephew to join him at dinner.

He was a thin, high shouldered man, of very gentleman-like appearance, with a hooked nose, and small, shrewd dark eyes.

He was faultlessly dressed, although he and his nephew were to dine alone.

A very punctilious man was squire Rolleston.

His nephew came into the room, looking very happy and handsome; his eyes very bright, a gay tune on his lips.

'You are late,' said the squire, rebukingly. 'Smith announced dinner three minutes ago.'

'I am a trifle late, sir. I beg your pardon, I'm sure,' said his nephew, cheerfully. 'The world was all couleur de rose with him just then, and there was brightness in his look and tone accordingly.'

'Where have you been all day?' asked the squire, as he took his seat at the table.

'Why, I'd a bit of an adventure this morning. Mr. Muggleton came very near having a quarrel with that black bull of his.'

'Eh?'

The squire looked across the table, eagerly.

He didn't like Mr. Muggleton, had a great contempt for his abilities as an agriculturist, and would have considered the bull a very discerning animal if it had given its owner a tossing.

Harry related the adventure of the morning; and, in conclusion, let slip the fact that he had spent the entire day at The Towers.

His uncle made no comment on this at the time; but when the grave old butler had withdrawn, and he and his nephew were sitting over their wine, he said, abruptly—

'What are you doing about that Muggleton girl? It's time the thing was settled one way or the other!'

The young man flushed a little.

He didn't like to hear his precious Vi spoken of as 'that Muggleton girl.'

'It's time the thing was settled—high time!' repeated the uncle.

'It is settled,' replied the nephew shortly.

'Oh, indeed! Are you going to marry her, then?'

'Yes.'

Harry still spoke shortly.

He didn't like his uncle's tone at all.

'Oh, well, I'm glad of that! I suppose the money'll be all right, eh, Harry?'

'Confound the money!' exclaimed Harry, with a sudden burst of wrath. 'I hate the very thought of it. I love Vi, and should have wanted to marry her if she hadn't had a farthing.'

'Yes, you might have wanted to, but you couldn't have done it!' said the squire with grim good-humour.

Harry's news came as a relief to him—a distinct relief.

He loved the lad, and wanted to see him make a figure in the world, and the only way in which he could do this was by marrying an heiress.

Vi's million would raise the Rolleston fortunes to even more than their former splendour.

'Yes, I should,' protested Harry, stoutly. 'It she had been as poor as I am myself, I should have married her all the same.'

The uncle was too wise to contradict. Under the circumstances, his nephew was quite welcome to his Quixotic notions.

He little dreamed that the time was near at hand for those notions to be severely tested.

'Mr. Muggleton consents, of course?' he said.

'Yes.'

And then the young man related what had passed between him and the millionaire.

The squire didn't take quite the same view of the case as his nephew did.

He wasn't in love with Vi, and therefore, was not inclined to think that she was, in herself, a greater prize than any fortune her father could bestow.

He was, moreover, a very proud man—proud of his race, and prone to look superciliously on all who could not trace their descent, as the Rollestons could for nearly a thousand years.

'Oh, yes, that's all right!' he said, coolly. 'Of course the man wishes to seem to confer a favor on you. We know what that means.'

'Why, of course he's conferring a favour!' declared Harry, hotly. 'Good Heavens! who am I that I should aspire to a lovely girl like Vi, and a fortune of a million pounds?'

'You are a Rolleston! That is enough! But, by Jove! it isn't enough—no, nor half enough. The obligation is all on my side. I felt so this morning when the old fellow was speaking so handsomely to me. I feel so still. I always shall feel it!'

'Ab, you're a foolish fellow!' said the uncle, coolly. 'You don't know your own value yet. Do you suppose that, if there wasn't a pile of money, I should ever permit my nephew—a Rolleston—to marry the daughter of a soap-maker?'

'Better fellows than I are jumping at the chance. Look at Granville. He's as good as engaged to Janetta.'

'Granville's ill very well; but he isn't a Rolleston.'

'No; and he isn't a pauper, and he can make his wife 'my lady.'

'A very trifling distinction in those days, when every provincial mayor may hope to do the same. The Granvilles would show a very poor pedigree by the side of the Rollestons.'

'Well, such things, like titles, aren't much thought of nowadays,' said Harry impatiently. 'I know I think myself a very lucky fellow, and although worthy of such a wife as Vi.'

'The girl is well enough,' said the proud squire; 'and she will be still better when she is removed from her family. I suppose I'd better pay them a call, eh, Harry?'

'I wish you would, sir. But, for Heaven's sake, don't say a word about the money!'

And then he suffered his nephew to go out and smoke a cigar, while he himself

leaned back in his chair, and meditated as to what was to be done with the soap-maker's money.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MR. TIPTAFT AS A WOOER.

A day or two after this, Mr. Muggleton was called upon to give away another of his daughters.

Sir Granville Granville sought an interview with him, and asked for the hand of Miss Janetta.

The millionaire was too shrewd a man of the world to suppose that this fine gentleman would have wished to ally himself with the house of Muggleton if it had not been for those tempting millions; but he hoped the baronet had some sort of an attachment to Janetta, and would make her a tolerable husband.

That Janetta cared for Sir Granville, he knew; and like a wise man, did not expect to find too much of romantic disinterestedness.

He gave his consent for his daughter to become Lady Granville, and Sir Granville departed from his presence a happy man.

He intended to build his ancestral home as soon as he should have got possession of his bride's fortune, to invite royalty to visit it, and altogether to show the world that the star of the Granvilles was in the ascendant.

Poor Marie was thus the only one of the Muggleton girls who was unappropriated. She had lost a little of her bright bloom, and a good deal of her gaiety of spirits.

The very mention of Sir Patrick's name had still power to thrill all her nerves with pain; and it did not help her piece of mind to know that her mother and sisters regarded her as one who had been crossed in love and were good-naturedly anxious to sympathize with her in her grief.

She had heard that Sir Patrick had set out for Africa; and Mr. Tiptaft had taken care to supplement this piece of news with the assurance that, when he returned, he would immediately celebrate his nuptials with that young lady of high birth on whom his affections were set.

He had heard this from his uncle, the earl, he said, and poor Marie never dreamed of doubting information derived from such a source.

As soon as her sisters were formally engaged, she, as a natural consequence, was left very much to herself.

Janetta and Vi were, of course, claimed almost exclusively by Sir Granville and Harry Rolleston.

This was Mr. Tiptaft's opportunity. Marie had resumed those charitable labours in his parish which Sir Patrick Donovan's arrival had so seriously interfered with, and he took care to superintend labours himself.

It Miss Muggleton visited a cottage, he visited it also.

Never before had the poor and sick of Little Cleeve received such attention from their pastor.

He was found of stepping into the house with the opening words of the office for the visitation of the sick upon his lips.

He would stand on the threshold, his head bared, his imposing form drawn to its full height, and say, in a loud, unctuous voice—

'Peace be to this house, and to all that dwell in it!'

And Marie sitting meekly beside the sick person, would think what a holy man he was, and how zealous in the discharge of his duties.

Very often he walked part of the way home with her, and then he would speak much of his high office, and his own unworthiness.

He would ask her opinion—with well-feigned anxiety—upon disputed points of doctrine, and would appear so genuinely devout and humble-minded, that a much wiser