

✱ A DAUGHTER OF JUDAS. ✱

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

CONTINUED.
CHAPTER XXV.
THE WEDDING NIGHT.

The chamber which had been prepared for the bridal pair was upholstered all in white, with here and there a touch of gold. Lilian's dressing-room opened out of it on one side, Sir Gerald's on the other. The pictures on the walls were gems of art; the toilet table was littered over with gold and silver, and ruby and crystal. A dainty neat, indeed, had Sir Gerald prepared for his bride.

The tiny clock on the mantel-piece chimed the hour of eleven.

At that sound, the silken counterpane was thrown aside by a restless hand, and Lilian half raised herself from among the laced trimmed pillows, and looked about her with a nervous, anxious glance.

It was an hour since her husband had quitted her with a tender kiss, after a tete-a-tete, which had lasted all the evening. She had gone out into the grounds to smoke a cigar.

She had come upstairs straightway, had disrobed her dainty form and brushed out her shimmering hair, and all so quickly, that half-an-hour had not passed before she was laid down to rest.

But now the hour had struck.

It was strange that Sir Gerald did not come.

Lilian listened intently, her cheek alternately flushing and paling, her hand pressed above her heart, at though she would still its too passionate pulsation.

Hark! was that a sound—an approaching footstep?

Yes! no! yes!

She could hear it distinctly now.

It was her husband's step falling rapidly in the corridor, as though he came in haste.

The door opened.

The bridegroom entered and advanced to the middle of the room.

He spoke not a word, however, and no word was spoken by the bride.

The silence, though it lasted not more than two or three moments, seemed oppressive.

Sir Gerald strode to the bedside, and roughly, almost savagely, seized the arm of his bride.

'Get up,' he commanded, in a harsh, strident voice. 'Get up and see what you have done.'

As he spoke, he turned up the lamp, which stood on a table near.

Lilian uttered a cry of terror, and well she might; for this was no lover, no tender husband.

His face was not as she had seen it an hour ago—radiant, joyous.

Instead, it was ghastly pale; the cheeks haggard, the mouth rigid, the teeth clenched, the eyes lurid and appalling in their gleam.

Deep down in Lilian's heart there was a latent fear which made her tremble as she looked at his altered countenance; but the next moment she told herself that what she dreaded could not have come to pass.

Rather was it that sudden madness had fallen on her husband.

What else but madness was there in those wildly gleaming eyes?

Full of terror though she was, she yet maintained a wonderful degree of calmness.

She did not flinch or cry out, or in any way anger him.

'Oh, Gerald!' was all she said, in a faint whisper, looking up at him, meanwhile, with sad, beseeching eyes.

'Get up!' he commanded again, tightening his grip upon her arm. 'Do you hear? I want you to go out into the woods with me.'

At this, in spite of her power of will, a shriek broke from her.

She glanced wildly round—desperate to escape from him.

'Hush!' he cried, still in those hoarse, strident tones. 'Call for help—utter a single cry, and I shall—kill you!'

Even as he spoke, he placed his hand roughly, savagely, over her lips—those perfect lips, which an hour ago he had deemed it Heaven to press to his own.

'Get up!' he said, once more.

And this time she obeyed him, retaining some semblance of composure still, though she was pale as death, and trembled very much.

She stood before him, in her grand, fair beauty; her golden hair falling about her like a veil; her dark eyes fixed upon him with a sad, beseeching glance.

Her fair form—clad only in a soft, clinging night-robe, the throat and arms revealed where the lace fell softly away from them, the bare feet tinted as exquisitely as the heart of a blush-rose—might, surely, have moved a husband to clasp her to his bosom, and cover her with kisses.

But there was no softening on Sir Gerald's face; his eyes grew only the more wildly fierce as they fell upon that perfect form.

In little more than five minutes she was dressed; a long dark cloak and hood covering all.

Sir Gerald took her by the arm, and passed with her into his dressing-room, whose long window opened on to the balcony which ran round the house.

In total silence he threw back the shutters, and unbarred the window, descended the steps of the balcony, and stood on the gravel path beneath, still holding her by the arm.

Once outside the house, alone with him in the darkness, she gave a wildly hurried

glance around, as though in search of someone whom she might summon to her aid.

He guessed her purpose; and, gripping her arm still tighter, hissed in her ear—

'It is useless to look for help. I have seen to that. The maids are gone to the village—both of them; the deaf house-keeper cannot hear you, and her husband is too busy with his wine. You are in my power. Utter a single word, and, by Heaven, it shall be your last. Come!'

And he drew her swiftly after him in the darkness.

Across the lawn, down the avenue, and through the gate to the great wood which stretched from the Dower House to Vivian Court.

Only a few short hours ago, he had stood there with her, his arm thrown fondly round her waist, his fancy painting their future in colors like to those of the sunset—roseate and gold.

And now—already the blackness of despair had fallen on his soul.

The night was very dark: there was no moon as yet, and the wood looked fearfully gloomy to Lilian's frightened eyes.

He urged her on, however—on and on through the gloomy shades, not speaking a word, and not suffering her to pause.

A cold perspiration broke out all over her; her heart throbbed almost to bursting.

The agonizing suspense, the uncertainty as to what might be his purpose, the conviction that she was wholly in his power, overwhelmed her, courageous though she was.

A deathly faintness seized upon her senses; her limbs trembled, and refused to support her weight.

When they had traversed about three-quarters-of-a-mile through the gloomy labyrinths of the wood, she tottered, and stumbled, and, in spite of his iron grip upon her arm, sank, half-swooning, on the ground.

Then, in an agony of fear, she clasped his knees with feeble strength.

The deathly whiteness of her face could be seen even in the darkness; her eyes were wild with terror, and yet there was a sad reproachfulness in them also, as she looked up at the man who had seen to love her with such a perfect love, and who could so treat her ere she had been a dozen hours his wife.

Gerald! she wailed—the immediate terror of the moment mastering every other feeling—'Have pity! Oh, have pity! At least, tell me where you are taking me?'

'You will know soon enough!' he answered, fiercely, while his eyes emitted a fearfully lurid gleam. 'Come!'

'I cannot!' she returned, faintly. 'If you kill me, I cannot help it! I can go no further. Let me die!'

And she fell forward on the ground, her death-cold brow touching his feet.

Seemingly in ignorance of her purpose, though she had all but swooned away, Sir Gerald stooped over her, and half-dragged, half-carried her into the deeper recesses of the wood.

In a few minutes he stopped, set her upon her feet, and kept her standing by grasping her arm again.

'Look!' he said, in a hoarse whisper. 'Look! This is what I have brought you here to see.'

With a faint moan, Lilian unclosed her eyes, then shuddered so convulsively as almost to rend herself out of his grasp, while she uttered shriek after shriek, which sounded fearfully in the stillness and darkness of the wood.

Well might she be overcome with horror, for ghastly was the sight that met her view. On a rustic seat, in the middle of a glade, sat a female form, mute and motionless as it had been a statue.

During the last few minutes, a waning moon had risen; a ray of light from it, wan and pale, pierced through the trees into the glade, revealing the spot that that weird figure belonged not to the living, but to the dead.

A fearsome sight to look upon.

An old woman, in a scarlet hood and cloak, an ominous stain on the bodice

52 BOILS

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of her dress, showing where her life blood had oozed away.

The eyes were wide open, and fixed, with a terrible ghastly stare.

Sir Gerald, with an alarmed and angry gesture, put his hand over Lilian's lips, as he had done in the bed chamber a little while ago, and thus forcibly restrained her shrieks.

'Silence!' he exclaimed. 'Are you mad?'

Then, in a tone of unsutterable bitterness, he added—

'You see your work! Was it well to keep your secret from me? Was it worth the cost of this?'

And he pointed to that dark terrible stain on the breast of the silent figure.

For answer, Lilian gave a moan of anguish, and sank on the ground before the dead woman.

CHAPTER XXVI. THE NEXT MORNING.

The sun rose bright and fair the next morning, above the Dower House.

There was nothing in nature in sympathy with that night of horror.

The lark sprang gaily from its nest among the corn, and flew up to the gates of Heaven with its matin song.

Its note, in the ears of the happy lovers, must surely have sounded like an invitation to share its joy.

On the grass the dew glistened like diamonds, and the sun was drawing it to its-It with a kiss.

Inside the Dower House all was busy preparation for the breakfast of Sir Gerald and his bride.

The old housekeeper laid the breakfast-table with her own hands; and, smoothing the damask table-cloth, saw that the silver tea and coffee service had attained the very highest degree of brilliancy, arranged the hot-house flowers with artistic taste, and assured herself that the exquisite china service of rose-colour and gold was the very handsomest her china-cupboard could boast.

Sir Gerald was walking up and down the lawn, in front of the open window, while she thus busied herself.

He had passed through the room, and given her a pleasant 'Good morning,' a few minutes ago, remarking that Lady Vere would be down presently.

Mrs. Newton's eye kept wandering to him every now and again, with that effectual, almost mothealy, pride which an old retainer so often feels in a young and well-liked master.

How handsome he was, she thought.

How handsome, with his pale complexion clear-cut features and brilliant eyes.

A little thoughtful to be sure, he looked this morning; but Mrs. Newton could understand that.

He knew he had taken upon himself new responsibilities; yes, and new cares, even though the cares were sweet ones.

It was the only right and proper man should take thought within himself at such a time.

At any rate, such was the opinion of Mrs. Newton.

'He's happy enough for all his serious look,' decided the good old lady. 'Anybody can see that with half an eye.'

The breakfast arrangements completed, she left the room, and was passing through the hall, when she saw her young mistress coming down the stairs.

A perfect dream of beauty looked Lady Vere, in a white muslin morning-gown, with knots of azure ribbon at her bosom.

The shimmer of her golden hair was wonderful; her eyes held a sweetly tender light.

She said in a charmingly gracious word or two to the old housekeeper, then passed into the breakfast-room, and out through the open window, to join her husband on the lawn.

Although it was to the end of September, the day was very warm—almost warmer than it had been all the summer through, and she needed nothing on her head.

She could let the sunlight dance and play in the meshes of that lovely golden hair.

Mrs. Newton, with a not unnatural curiosity, watched the newly-wedded pair from behind a window curtain.

If she had caught the maids doing such a thing, she would have rated them soundly.

But then, what is the use of being a housekeeper, if one may not enjoy privileges forbidden to maids?

'Pretty creature!' murmured the old dame, as she saw Lady Vere slip her arm inside her husband's, and steal a sweet, upward glance into his face. 'It reminds me of my own young days—it does.'

'She's as beautiful as they said. I never saw such a lovely face in all my life; but a little delicate, I'm afraid; just a shade too pale, and there's a sort of sadness in her eyes.'

'How sweetly she looks at him, half appealingly, like—and yet, somehow, it doesn't seem exactly a look of love. I wonder, now, whether it was a love matron on her side as well as his?'

'Well, she's a splendid creature. I don't wonder he fell in love with her; and I'm sure he's that nice and kind, that, whether she cares for him now or not, she will do very soon.'

Sir Gerald and Lady Vere, all unconscious of the opinions that were being passed upon them, crossed the lawn, and stepped into the breakfast-room; and the housekeeper descended to the kitchen to look after her husband and maids.

Half-an-hour later, the gardener came into the house, full of excitement.

'Have you heard the news, ma'am?' he said to the housekeeper, knowing quite well she hadn't and preparing to tell it with all the gusto of his class.

'No; what is it?'

'There's been a murder done, in the wood, last night.'

'A murder! Good Heavens! Who is it that's murdered, Smith?'

'An old Woman. Nobody that belongs about here. A gipsy, I think, or something of that sort, she wears a red cloak and hood.'

'Tom Lovett, the gamekeeper, found the

body as he was coming through the wood this morning. It was on a seat, near the Hawthorne Hollow.'

'Heaven save us! What a shocking thing, how had the poor soul been killed?'

'She—they say.'

'I wonder if it's those poachers! I shouldn't be surprised.'

'But why should they kill an old woman?'

'objected one of the maids, who had stood by in horrified silence till now.'

'Perhaps it was by accident,' the gardener returned; 'and they'd make off after it, knowing they'd been up to no good.'

'Perhaps so said the housekeeper. Dear, dear! how sorry Sir Gerald'll be—and his dear sweet lady too! It almost seems an ill omen, happening just after their marriage, as one may say.'

Mrs. Newton did not think proper to intrude upon her master and mistress while they were at breakfast, not even with such an important piece of news; but when, about an hour later, Sir Gerald came out to order the pony carriage, while Lady Vere went upstairs to don her hat and gloves, she ventured to approach him with—

'I'm sorry to say a very shocking thing has happened in the night, Sir Gerald.'

'Indeed! What is that, Mrs. Newton?'

He was standing near a window, and did not turn to look at the housekeeper, as he asked the question.

His tone seemed a careless one.

'There's been a murder done, Sir Gerald—a poor old woman shot near the Hawthorne Hollow. And they say she's one of your tenants, and lived opposite the Court gates. Somebody has recognized her.'

'Not Madge Rivers?' said Sir Gerald, turning hastily, and looking greatly shocked.

'Indeed,' as Mrs. Newton remarked afterwards to her husband, 'he turned as white as a sheet, poor dear gentleman. But, then, he always had a feeling heart.'

'Yes, Sir Gerald, that's the name.'

At this juncture the butler, who had kept in the background at the further end of the hall, ventured forward and took up the story, knowing that his wife, by reason of her deafness, was not very well qualified to answer questions.

'The mystery is, Sir Gerald, what she was doing so far from home,' he remarked, respectfully. 'She knows nobody in these parts, and had no business here at all, as far as anybody can make out. It must be four miles from her house to the place where she was found. That's a stiffish walk for a woman of her age.'

'It is indeed,' said Sir Gerald.

But he spoke with a curious abstractedness, as though he did not know what he was saying.

'He was still quite pale.'

'Is there any clue?' he asked, abruptly.

'Have the police any theory at all?'

The butler broached the theory of poachers, which had been suggested by his wife.

'Ah! That seems likely,' exclaimed Sir Gerald.

He spoke in a tone of genuine relief.

'One wouldn't like to think an old woman like that could be deliberately murdered,' he added, after a moment or two.

'The doctor thinks she had been dead about eight hours [when she was found,' the butler observed. 'That was at seven o'clock this morning, so, in that case, it would fix the time at about eleven last night.'

'Yes, it would,' said Sir Gerald, in the same abstracted tone in which he had spoken a minute or two ago.

He turned to the window again, and stood looking out, evidently deep in thought.

'Does the doctor say whether death was instantaneous?' he asked, suddenly, as though an idea had struck him.

'I don't know, Sir Gerald.'

'Because, if the poor creature was not killed on the spot, isn't it possible she met with the injury nearer her own home, and dragged herself to near the Hollow after she was wounded. That would account for her being found so far away from home.'

Sir Gerald spoke hurriedly, and with eagerness.

He seemed anxious to impress his servants with this view of the matter.

At this moment Lilian appeared at the top of the staircase, ready for her drive.

Her husband caught sight of her, and whispered, hurriedly, in the butler's ear—

'Mind, not a word of this to Lady Vere. She will have to hear of it ultimately, I suppose, but it need not be to-day.'

With a supreme effort he banished the grave look of anxiety and horror from his face, and, smiling tenderly, went to the foot of the stairs to meet his bride.

The day was spent by the newly-wedded pair as such days usually are spent.

They drove out in the phaeton, and returned home to luncheon; after luncheon they walked about in the grounds until tea was served for them in a dainty arbour; and the evening was spent chiefly in Lady Vere's boudoir, she singing to Sir Gerald in a thrilling sweet voice, and he hanging over her with all the devotedness which is to be expected in a husband of a day.

She wore a dinner dress of shimmering silver blue.

The short sleeves were edged with lace.

In reaching for some music which lay on the top of the piano, this lace became disarranged.

It fell back, revealing the arm beneath. A beautiful arm, indeed—round, and satin soft, with exquisite dimples at the elbow, and tinted like the heart of a blush-rose.

But to night there was an ugly bruise on that fair flesh—a big, black, cruel-looking bruise—just such a mark as might have been caused by the fierce grip of a man's hand.

The lamplight fell full upon it.

Sir Gerald, standing near, could not fail to see it; he did see it, and a wave of agony and remorse swept over his face.

'Lilian, did I do that?'

She did not answer him for a moment.

A taint flush tinged her cheek; then, suddenly turning, she put that bruised arm round his neck, and looked into his face with sweetly mournful eyes.

'Don't let it trouble you, dear,' she whispered. 'Think no more of it. I never shall.'

But he could not be thus pacified.

He seemed almost beside himself with grief and horror.

He took the cruelly-bruised arm in both his hands, and pressed on it a rain of penitent kisses; then he suddenly threw himself on his knees at her feet, and, putting his arms round her, drew her head down to his.

'I was mad! mad! mad!' he cried, in a broken whisper. 'Forgive me—oh, forgive me!'

'I do—indeed I do!' she whispered back.

And she clung to him, and pressed her cheek against his own.

But, even, as she did this, there was a strange look in her beautiful dark eyes—it was a look of terror.

One would have said she was frightened of her husband.

To be continued.

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What will your decision be sufferer? Will you allow the many symptoms of disease and death to more fully develop, or will you, by the aid of nature's medicine, Paine's Celery Compound, strike just now at the root of your trouble and be made sound, healthy and happy?

The ablest physicians admit that Paine's Celery Compound is the only true nerve-food and medicine that has ever been given to suffering humanity. It strengthens and builds up the nerves, tissues and muscles, it purifies the life stream, casts out disease of every form, giving a fresh existence and a long and happy life. A trial of one bottle will convince you that Paine's Celery Compound is a life-saver and a disease banisher.

Musical Recitation.

The pupils in the one district school of a New Hampshire village are taught a combination of music, morals and mathematics. A visitor to the school had the pleasure of joining in the chorus of the song, in which the results of this mixed teaching were plainly shown. It was our lively 'Yankee Doodle' to which the words were set, and the first verse was as follows:

The surest way on earth to make
A great and glorious nation,
Is for each boy and girl to get
A thorough education.
Five times five are twenty-five,
Five times six are thirty,
Five times seven are thirty-five
And five times eight are forty.

Scientists say that